



Testimony of Maine Broadband Coalition
in Support of LD 1432

April 27, 2021

Greetings Senator Lawrence and Rep. Berry and members of the Energy, Utilities and Technology committee. My name is Andrew Butcher, and this testimony is on behalf of the Maine Broadband Coalition – your partner in creating solutions for Broadband policy and programming - to testify in **support of LD 1432 An Act An Act to Update the Municipal Gigabit Broadband Network Access Fund**

The Maine Broadband Coalition (The Coalition) is a statewide network of over 2200 stakeholders working to advance the policy, resources, and infrastructure necessary to enable affordable, reliable, and future oriented high-speed internet for all. The Coalition is guided through a 30-member Advisory Committee representing a range geographies, industries, sectors, and issues including Internet Service Providers, community-based organizations, non-profits, governmental agencies and private technology companies. We all share the belief that access to affordable high-speed internet for everyone benefits everyone.

As you know, due to lack of **funding**, the current structure of the Gigabit Fund is a dormant mechanism intended to incentivize the fastest and highest performing internet service possible irrespective of current service. The reforms proposed through LD 1432 have the potential to spur an underutilized and potentially catalytic market force – that of public-private partnerships and publicly owned internet infrastructure serving as one important tool in the toolkit Maine needs to achieve the goal of affordable high speed internet for all of Maine.

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Publicly owned internet infrastructure may not be the best fit for all communities as there are many factors to determine success, starting with a community's goals and capacity. However, in many small, rural, and remote places it may be the operating model that best ensures the elimination of a digital divide and maximizes local control and self-sustainability.

A central tenet to many incumbent internet service provider business models is to own the infrastructure that provides the distribution of internet service. To this extent many State and Federal funding resources subsize that ownership to allow for operations in non-profitable conditions. LD 1432 structures the Gigabit Fund to afford the same to publicly owned networks and could direct bonds and other revenue sources accordingly.

Today you may hear of a few cherry-picked examples of municipally owned projects that failed, and just like any business model, not all efforts succeed. However, it is widely regarded that publicly owned internet infrastructure when paired with a sufficient funding mechanism can affordably and reliably address connectivity goals. The Institute for Local Self Reliance – Community Networks has a map of over 700 locations where there are viable, functional and high performing publicly owned networks. In fact there are well known examples here in Maine in Sanford, Islesboro, and Calais, Baileyville, and Alexander that set the standard for the economic and community benefit inherent in publicly owned broadband infrastructure.. See the Map at: <https://muninetworks.org/communitymap> and join the Broadband Coalition for a focused dialogue around such models on May 13th as a part of our Digital Frontiers series

highlighting the innovations, pioneers and solutions that are forging Maine's digital infrastructure.
<https://www.mainebroadbandcoalition.org/events-2>

The Gigabit fund represents an important mechanism to enable more diverse, competitive, and locally oriented broadband infrastructure, and the Broadband Coalition urges you to approve LD 1432 towards the reformatting and upgrading of the fund.

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