



# Maine Developmental Disabilities Council

## Council Members

Marc Roix  
*Co-Chair*

Deb Davis  
*Co-Chair*

Cheryl Stalionis  
*Treasurer*

Jon McGovern

Kile Pelletier

Shannon Johnson

Denise Ranger

Jean Youde

Tracey Webb

Gayle Chambers

Maggie Hoffman

Maryann Preble

Courtney Putnam

Nicole Achey

Sarah Trites

Monique Stairs  
*SUFU Representative*

Sue Russell  
*CCIDS Representative*

Kim Moody  
*DRM Representative*

Craig Patterson  
*OADS Representative*

Ann Belanger  
*DOE Representative*

Suzanne Primiano  
*DOL Representative*

Roy Fowler  
*CDS Representative*

Cheryl Hathaway  
*OCFS Representative*

Maryann Harakall  
*CSHN Representative*

5 April 2021

LD 1555 "An Act To Fund Broadband Internet Infrastructure for Marginalized Groups in the State"

Senator Lawrence, Representative Berry, and the distinguished members of the Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology.

My name is Rachel Dyer, and I am the associate director of the Maine Developmental Disabilities Council. Councils on Developmental Disabilities were created through the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act (DD Act) in 1970. Maine's DD Council has been advocating for individuals with Developmental Disabilities (DD) for over 40 years. The DD Council is a federally funded, independent organization with members from across the state, including persons with disabilities, family members, and representatives of public and private agencies which provide services and/or funding for services for individuals with developmental disabilities. As required in federal law, we are involved in advocacy, capacity building and systemic change activities, with the goal that individuals with developmental and other disabilities of all ages are fully included, integrated and involved in their communities and the decisions impacting their lives.

Covid-19 is shining a light on the utility of technology even as it increases the gaps experienced by Mainers who are poor, live in rural areas, and lack otherwise infrastructure and support to use it, including individuals with developmental disabilities. By the end of April 2020 there were clear indications that people with developmental disabilities were unduly impacted by both the coronavirus itself as well as the societal repercussions of "stay at home" orders and social distancing mandates. Congregate settings were becoming hotspots of transmission, and the services that people with DD depend on were being shut down or moved to virtual settings. We have long known that people with DD are largely on the wrong side of the digital divide, lacking access to the tools that allow for online and virtual connection, due to the costs of hardware, the learning curve to understand how to use devices, and connectivity issues across the state, among other factors. While this bill does not address the many aspects of the digital divide, it takes an important step in acknowledging how critical access is.

It is unconscionable that people who live in poverty and who have been isolated should lack access to the type of broadband connection that so many of us have relied upon for most of our social connections over the past year, MDDC suggests that "disability" be considered in determining underserved populations and urges the Committee to support this resolve.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.