

Testimony in Support of LD1432
An Act to Update the Municipal Gigabit Broadband Network Access Fund
April 26, 2021

Good Morning Senate Chair Lawrence and House Chair Berry and honorable members of the Energy, Utilities and Technology Committee.

My name is Valli Geiger and I am the House Representative for District 93, Rockland and Owls Head. I testify this morning in support of LD 1432, An Act to Update the Municipal Gigabit Broadband Network Access Fund.

If the Covid-19 pandemic has taught us anything, it is that public access to reliable internet is now as critical as the roads we drive on, and the public infrastructures that ensure electricity, clean, safe potable water, and sewage treatment and disposal. Internet is now a critical utility we must have access to in order to work, go to school, have access to information and the ability to communicate.

Rockland is one of the 9 members of the Midcoast Internet Coalition working to bring broadband to the Midcoast region through the creation of a publically owned regional utility. Maine has struggled for years to bring broadband to our state. We still do not have broad, reliable internet coverage at the speeds needed for work and school. Without this access, Maine cannot be a state with a future.

While we have a multitude of businesses providing internet, it is often expensive, spotty, and lacking in symmetrical speeds needed for work and school.

This is our opportunity to create, design, construct open access broadband infrastructure. Non-profit or public entities must be allowed to compete with for profit ISP's and should be eligible for ConnectME grants to construct and operate broadband infrastructure. Why are we using public monies to provide funding for for-profit entities who will own their infrastructure and preclude others from using this publically funded infrastructure?

As relief and infrastructure funds flow into Maine, LD1432 is an important tool to ensure that our municipalities own the networks needed to serve their communities, setting the terms to ensure symmetrical service equal to needs without exorbitant pricing.

Thank you for this opportunity and thank you Representative Berry for sponsoring this bill. We are at a critical moment, one that will determine Maine's future for decades to come. We have an opportunity to build a broadband infrastructure that is accessible, reliable and affordable at symmetrical speeds that will allow anyone to work from anywhere. Our growth depends on this ability.