



## Maine Municipal Association

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### Testimony of the Maine Municipal Association

#### In Support of

*LD 1432 – An Act To Update the Municipal Gigabit Broadband Network Access Fund*

April 27, 2021

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Senator Lawrence, Representative Berry and members of the Energy, Utilities and Technology Committee, my name is Neal Goldberg, and I am providing testimony in support of LD 1432 on behalf of MMA's Legislative Policy Committee.

This bill makes needed changes to a fund that facilitates municipal investment into broadband infrastructure. Removing the "community" definition makes the fund more accessible to all of the Association's members because as written the original bill requires a waiver from the Connect Maine Authority in order for municipalities under 1,200 people to apply. This definition initially precluded 235 municipalities from accessing the Fund until they were deemed unserved or underserved by the authority.

The COVID-19 pandemic pushed our dependence on reliable broadband to such an extent that nearly every community, in some manner, has insufficient high-speed broadband infrastructure. Now is the time to extend the Municipal Gigabit Broadband Network Access Fund to all communities, not just those with larger populations or outdated concepts of unserved or underserved broadband areas.

If smaller rural communities remain overlooked by the Municipal Gigabit Broadband Network Access Fund then a rift between communities with and without the financial wherewithal to make needed investment in broadband infrastructure will form. The grants provided by this fund can be the financial contribution that tips a broadband project into the realm of possibility for many municipalities.

These valuable state contributions also help municipalities establish competitive broadband utilities that prevent predatory behaviors by internet service providers. This bill would apply public funds for municipalities to own their broadband networks instead of continuing the problematic pattern of providing public money to for-profit entities who retain ownership and rate-setting authority of an important utility.

The changes proposed in LD 1432 make the Municipal Gigabit Broadband Network Access Fund an equitable grant opportunity for all. Thank you for your time and consideration on this very important matter.