



JANET T. MILLS  
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MAINE  
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC  
AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT



HEATHER JOHNSON  
COMMISSIONER

**Testimony Of: Commissioner Heather Johnson**  
**In support of LD 1484**  
April 27, 2021

Senator Lawrence, Representative Berry and distinguished members of the Energy, Utilities, and Technology Committee, my name is Heather Johnson and I am the Commissioner of the Department of Economic and Community Development. I am here today to testify in support of the bipartisan amendment of LD 1484.

High speed internet access is critical to improving the lives of Maine's people and driving the opportunity for Maine's businesses.

To support universal access, we need to address the three major barriers:

1. A lack of physical infrastructure, especially in rural communities, necessary to ensure reliable access to high speed internet. The low population density of rural Maine has made it unprofitable for the private sector to expand their networks independently;
2. A lack of digital literacy necessary to understand and utilize emerging technology and;
3. A lack of affordability. According to the Pew Charitable Trusts, 4 in 10 adults with incomes below \$30,000 do not have broadband access. That leaves many households dependent on free wifi hotspots at schools, libraries, and places of business.

The amendment to LD1484 will establish the Maine Connectivity Authority to put Maine in the driver's seat when it comes to expanding affordable broadband. This Authority will look at markets that need support and utilize a new suite of financial tools that allow the Authority to work with the private sector to find, creative individual solutions that meet both the infrastructure build out and a look at affordability to ensure all Maine people can have access.

Maine is uniquely positioned to execute this type of creative solution. Maine has strong providers who are willing to work on difficult projects. Now, we will have an Authority that will have a number of financial mechanisms at their disposal to work with the private sector to address the needs of the market. The Authority will be able to hold assets as well when necessary to achieve the Authority goals.

ConnectMaine will continue its important work as a division of this new Authority.



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I look forward to working with Senator Bennett, Representative Berry, members of this Committee, and the Legislature, and the private sector on this amendment which will help drive Maine to universal access.

Thank you for your time and I am happy to take any questions.