



April 27, 2021

Honorable Mark Lawrence

Honorable Seth Berry

Co-Chairs

Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology c/o Legislative Information

100 State House Station Augusta, ME 04333

Re: Maine LD 1484 “An Act to Enhance the ConnectMaine Authority's Capacity to Provide World-class Internet”

Sen. Lawrence, Rep. Berry, and members of the EUT Committee;

My name is Fletcher Kittredge, I am a citizen of Biddeford, the CEO of GWI, a Maine-based fiber broadband provider and a founding member of the Maine Broadband Coalition. Years ago, I was heavily involved in passing the original ConnectME bill and writing the original rules. I served as the first Co-Chairman of the ConnectME Advisory Board. I thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify in favor of this important bill which strengthens this important agency, allowing it to effectively perform its new duties.

Based on the history of effective, bipartisan legislation passed by this committee and the Maine legislature, it is clear that there is a statewide understanding of the vital necessity of fast, reliable broadband networks serving all Maine communities and citizens, so I will not belabor the point. Instead I want to point out key points that are easy to miss in this complex and rapidly changing industry. Post-pandemic, the current two person ConnectMaine agency is funded and structured for a world that no longer exists.

Just as government investment is required to provide road, electric, and telephone service to rural and disadvantaged communities, government investment is required for broadband and there is **strong, bipartisan support at the federal level to have government investment flow through the states**. The most recent funding at both the state level, the \$15 million broadband bond, and the Federal CARES Act funding, which will bring approximately \$139 million to Maine, need to be invested and administered by the Maine State government. This is a contrast to past federal programs which routed funding through the USDA, NTIA, or FCC. For the future, both national parties support broadband funding in their competing infrastructure bills, with disagreements on amount, and both seem inclined to route the funding through the states. The states then have the new responsibility to identify, evaluate, fund, and administer project funding.

The legislature must act in this session. The CARES and bond funding is already on its way. The State of Maine already has the responsibilities described above and there is an urgent need to fund and structure ConnectMaine so that it can do an excellent job at meeting those responsibilities. If **either** the Democratic, Republican or compromise version of the infrastructure bill passes, this need will increase exponentially because the State of Maine will have responsibility for effectively deploying exponentially greater funding **within the next eighteen months**. Given the time necessary staff up, work must start immediately.



ConnectMaine needs to build the following additional capacity:

1. Financial analysis: the ability to analyze different projects and business models,
2. Technical analysis: the ability to determine current and future technical requirements and evaluate different technology solutions to ensure they meet those requirements,
3. Auditing: the ongoing and long-term ability to audit projects and systems to insure they meet technical, financial, and service goals,

Of the State of Maine's existing agencies, these capacities most closely match the Maine Technology Institute (MTI). However, the details are significantly different as MTI has general expertise and the Connect Maine Agency will need specific expertise targeted at broadband.

Other States have successfully built agencies such as the proposed Connect Maine Agency and are therefore ahead of us. Please see the [Massachusetts Broadband Institute](#) as an example.

The Connect Maine Agency will be needed for the long term. The initial slug of funding will take a minimum of four years to fully deploy. It is highly likely that later in this decade there will be additional funding to fully ensure universal broadband service. The lifetime of key components of these assets funded by these investments is 30-40 years and projects will need to be audited and administered for the full length of the lifetime in order for the public to receive the benefit of the public's investment. Technology continues to advance and the State's needs will evolve over decades. What will not change is the State's interest in ensuring Maine has quality communications infrastructure.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.



Fletcher Kittredge
CEO
GWI