



James F. Nimon
Executive Director

**TESTIMONY OF
James F. Nimon, Executive Director
Sanford Regional Economic Growth Council**

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology

**In Support of
L.D. 1432 “An Act to Update the Municipal Gigabit Broadband Network Access Fund”**

Public Hearing, Tuesday, April 27, 2021

Senator Lawrence, Representative Berry, and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology, my name is Jim Nimon, and I bring greetings from Sanford~Springvale, home to SanfordNet Fiber, Maine’s largest community broadband network (<https://sanfordgrowth.com/sanfordnet-fiber/>).

The Sanford Regional Economic Growth Council, as a private 501(c)(6) nonprofit corporation operating since 2009, is the lead economic development organization in the Sanford~Springvale region. I have been the growth council’s director for ten years.

The growth council and the City of Sanford (especially City Manager Steven Buck who has testified before you on a number of occasions) have been working since late 2013 to establish a municipal broadband network. While the path has been a difficult one, we were fortunate to work early on with Maine-based companies like Tilson and GWI, as we strategized how best to plan, fund, build and operate a community network.

From day one we were convinced that an open-access, non-discriminatory, symmetrical, fiber-optic network was the future-proof path to long-term economic success within our municipality. Economists later reviewed our proposal and agreed. We wanted to lead with a business network for economic development reasons. And off we went to build support within our city, especially the critical community anchor institutions – business parks, millyard, hospital, school and city.

After years of business planning, and searching for, and finally securing funding (from the city primarily, with support from EDA), we were able to seek and select a network builder and operator for SanfordNet Fiber. GWI is the operator and first ISP providing services on the 45-mile business network which went live in the Fall of 2019.

With the economy on the rebound in 2021, and hundreds of businesses along the network’s fiber backbone, we are now working to expand subscribers. We’re presently offering virtual information sessions to enhance awareness of the mutual benefits that SanfordNet Fiber provides for the company and the city. We believe that a public-private partnership like SanfordNet Fiber, with municipal ownership of fiber assets and equipment, and local private sector network construction, operation and service provision, is a model to be emulated and encouraged.

I’m testifying today in support of L.D. 1432, because it provides grants exclusively to municipalities, defines some of the key terms to ensure network integrity, and raises the bar on minimum upload and download speeds. These are significant steps to help get Maine and its municipalities further down the road to constructing the best high-speed fiber optic networks for their businesses and residents.

Thank you for your consideration. I’d be glad to answer any questions you may have.