



Testimony of Downeast Broadband Utility in Support of LD 1432, An Act to Update the Municipal Gigabit Broadband Network Access Fund

April 27th, 2021

Senator Lawrence, Representative Berry and members of the Energy, Utilities and Technology Committee, thank you for this opportunity to weigh in on LD 1432.

My name is Dan Sullivan, President of Downeast Broadband Utility (DBU), Maine's first and only municipally owned high-speed broadband fiber network.

The towns of Calais and Baileyville have built a municipally owned, operational fiber to the home broadband network for 100% of the citizens of our communities. This network is owned by the townspeople and operated by a local board consisting of our City and Town Managers, Selectpersons and local community leaders. In addition, we are currently working with the Town of Alexander to expand to their community. The DBU network is referred to as an "*Open access, dark fiber network*". In laymen terms that means the actual physical fiber network is owned by the communities. The broadband signal across the network to the home is provided by multiple private Internet Service Providers (ISP's).

This network allows for competition between multiple providers giving our citizens choice and lower costs. What the municipal model does NOT do is block our existing ISP's from selling their product to customers. What it DOES do is allow our existing ISP's to sell their service while reducing their own costs. The network is built and is maintained by the

towns allowing our private ISP companies to supply future proof fiber broadband across the locally owned infrastructure without having to invest in building and maintaining the network itself. Result.....increased profit for private companies and lower costs for consumers.

This network provides a minimum 100\100mb symmetrical connection with the ability to increase to 1 gigabit and beyond. Technology has not yet maximized the capabilities of fiber optics. Experts believe these fiber optic cables will be a viable broadband transport mechanism for 100+ years.

Our network is paid for by the subscribers to the ISP's service not our taxpayers. A portion of what our citizens pay to these private companies for their broadband connection comes back to the towns to pay for the network. Once the infrastructure is paid for those ongoing fees will be a revenue stream for our cities and towns.

Building municipally owned fiber networks is an excellent use of public funds. Fiber cables attached to existing telephone poles provide the conduit for better broadband. As technology changes and faster speeds are needed only the equipment in our two communication cabinets needs to be changed. The fiber itself need not be upgraded. Satellite, cable, dsl and fixed wireless broadband upgrades are expensive and labor intensive with the costs often passed on to the consumer. Imagine the costs of climbing 300-foot cell towers replacing old, outdated copper and repurposing satellites to make upgrades every time technology changes. Fiber networks incur none of these costs.

DBU has been contacted by towns and cities across Maine seeking help in building their own municipally owned fiber infrastructure. These communities struggle to meet their existing financial needs let alone improve their broadband. Assistance to the broadband sector is a crucial part of how LD 1432 can help.

Imagine if Maine's Municipal Gigabit Fund could be modified to support municipal broadband across Maine! This would bring world-class high-speed broadband to every citizen in every town and city, while providing the infrastructure to help our existing ISP's thrive. Imagine utilizing public funds to create a future proof broadband infrastructure capable of positioning Maine ahead of the future for the next 100+ years! LD 1432's changes to Maine's Municipal Gigabit Fund can be instrumental in bringing this idea to fruition.

LD 1432's changes to Maine's Municipal Gigabit Fund are a necessary and important step in providing sustainable, affordable broadband in Maine. Changes to this fund will provide a path for more municipally owned networks across the state.

LD 1432 contains the critical changes needed in moving Maine's broadband needs forward. As a fully functioning municipally owned broadband network, DBU is a viable model that is applicable across all of Maine. I would be happy to share more detailed information about the DBU model with your committee.

Downeast Broadband Utility strongly encourages you to pass LD 1432.

Thank you.

Dan Sullivan

President

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