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Greetings members of the Energy, Utilities, and Technology Committee. I am writing in favor of LD1708 because along with the increased reliability and lower cost to consumers, a COU could help with our state's goal of expanding rural broadband.

I work in the telecom industry helping organizations design and build fiber networks. One topic frequently brought up by the ISPs, co-ops, and construction firms who are designing these new networks is how to obtain the location information and permitting requirements of telephone poles. For smaller providers, especially on the municipal level, the costs of obtaining pole information represents a large financial burden—Not only capital costs of building the network but the operating costs of pole leasing. Companies also place an additional burden on network designers by charging fees to make poles ready for fiber networks, sometimes called “make-ready” or “attachment” costs. These burdens limit the number of homes a provider can serve or in some cases, cancel a plan entirely.

Maine is still one of the lowest-ranked states for internet speeds and access, and the voters of Maine know that expanding broadband is a top priority. It was only last year where we voted to bond \$15 million for that very cause. But making more money available is only part of the solution because CMP and Versant's high make-ready fees and other charges have blocked rural broadband development.

“It is common knowledge to broadband providers and those endeavoring to be broadband providers that make ready fees typically constitute one of the most significant impediments to implementing local broadband expansion efforts. After budget projections have been established, utilities' tacked on make-ready fees have commonly added 20–30% to the overall project costs.” “Testimony of the Maine Municipal Association In Support of LD 1192 An Act To Establish Municipal Access to Utility Poles Located in Municipal Rights-of-way,” March 27, 2019 at <https://legislature.maine.gov/legis/bills/getTestimonyDoc.asp?id=113022>.

Combined with the investment already allocated from the state and federal government, a COU committed to expanding rural broadband would be a boon for the municipalities and organizations working on this issue. LD1708 represents more money going to our state's priorities and less to private interests.

Thank you for your time.