

Chairmen Lawrence and Berry, and Energy, Utilities and Technology Committee members. I am providing testimony in favor of approval of LD 1949, An Act to Amend the Charter of the Caribou Utilities District to Include Broadband Services.

The Caribou Utilities District (CUD) has been in existence in various forms since 1887 when the Legislature granted a charter to the Caribou Water Company, followed by adding Caribou Electric Power Company to the charter in 1891, and by adding the Caribou Sewer Company in 1895 all privately owned. The public CUD entity was formed in 1945 and was granted a charter by the Legislature with authority to acquire all three private companies. However, the CUD was only able to acquire the Sewer Company – the Water and Power Companies were purchased by larger private companies that were expanding and regionalizing their assets. The CUD then was just a sewer – now wastewater – provider for Caribou until 1989. The CUD was able to purchase the Caribou Waterworks infrastructure for \$ 2.25 million from the General Waterworks Co. that was divesting assets in Maine.

Since that acquisition, the CUD has invested several millions of dollars in maintaining and upgrading the water and wastewater infrastructure in Caribou. This investment has improved service, streamlined operations, and expanded capacity of both systems while maintaining some of the most affordable rates in the State.

The CUD Trustees represent a diverse cross section of the City, with three of the members having over 15 years' experience each on the Board. Since the acquisition of the Water Division, the CUD Trustees and staff have transformed the District from two reactive, dysfunctional companies into a progressive, proactive, cohesive organization. While the CUD is a quasi-municipal organization, unlike other City departments it functions autonomously with little or no oversight from the City Council or City Manager.

The CUD has a proven track record of providing excellent service, committed stewardship, and fiscal responsibility for Caribou's water and wastewater infrastructure. The CUD also has a proven track record of prioritizing, planning, designing and executing construction projects, the most recent a just completed \$6 million upgrade to the Grimes Wastewater Treatment Facility.

The CUD has the experience, capacity, and most important the desire to build a public broadband fiber network that serves everyone in Caribou, not just the easy and profitable portions of the City. The large telecom companies have had over 10 years to build on the three ring binder dark fiber network, but have chosen to stick with their own proprietary legacy systems that they promote as broadband but are really hybrid systems using fiber to central hubs, not to each customer. They serve the compact areas that meet their payback and profit standards and leave many of us behind – the proverbial profits over people. Their primary strategy is to restrict market competition, keep prices high and maximize profits and will use every tactic available to oppose initiatives such as ours. Coaxial cable and other service is not available on my rural road, but friends who do subscribe to these services complain constantly about the high

cost, reduction in service and regular cost increases. We are able to get very low quality DSL at our home over copper phone lines– 3.5 Mbps down; 0.75 up on a good day. When the weather is bad, when school gets out, weekends or anytime internet use is high we often have unstable or no internet. Technically I expect we are considered underserved, but in reality in today's world I would say we are unserved. Our neighbors for the next 3 miles have only a wireless option – I consider them unserved as well.

The CUD would be the best entity to build, own, and operate a public, open fiber network to bring true broadband access to everyone in Caribou. We are the City's Utility District, we have a proven track record of dependable, affordable service and we have extensive project execution experience. At our recent local public hearing we received much favorable input and support for our pursuit of this project. An affordable, true broadband service that is locally owned and controlled and is universally available is badly needed in the City of Caribou!

We seek your recommendation for approval of our charter amendment without the influence of giant telecom companies so that we may proceed with development of this project.

My name is David Belyea; I live at 204 Bailey Road in Caribou. I am a licensed professional engineer in Maine (since 1981!). I have extensive experience in management as well as planning, designing, and executing large infrastructure projects. I have 21 years' experience as a CUD Trustee, 5 years as its president. I believe broadband service would be an excellent addition to the CUD service portfolio.

Thank you for your consideration.

David Belyea
Caribou Utilities District
LD 1949

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