

**The Maine Heritage Policy Center
Testimony to Support LD 1651
"An Act To Promote Equitable and Responsible Broadband
Investment"**

Senator Lawrence, Representative Berry and distinguished members of the Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology, my name is Adam Crepeau and I serve as a policy analyst at The Maine Heritage Policy Center. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of LD 1651.

At the outset, I want to emphasize that The Maine Heritage Policy Center firmly believes that expanding broadband access in Maine is an important public policy goal and is a necessity if Maine is to compete economically in the 21 century. However, we strongly believe that government interference in the free market--even when motivated by the best of intentions--should not occur without careful study and consideration for local taxpayers. Above all, this bill is meant to create a structured process for municipalities to follow when considering broadband investments.

Critics of this bill have claimed that it undermines local control by imposing state regulations on towns and cities. That simply is not the case. The centerpiece of this legislation is the requirement that towns conduct a feasibility study, hold meetings to inform the public, and seek residents' approval through referendum. This bill brings decision-making authority to the lowest possible level; the voters get to decide whether investing in broadband is a wise decision for their community. In other words, this bill would increase transparency (and local control) for voters by arming them with the necessary information to make an informed decision about broadband investments.

Year after year, municipalities testify on proposals that would shrink the revenue sharing program or allow them to implement a local-option sales tax. Town managers and city council members often describe how their budgets have been cut to the bone and that local property taxpayers have had enough. Broadband projects can cost millions or even tens of millions of dollars and can have long-term financial consequences for a small town. In making such an important decision, it is common sense that these municipalities employ a deliberative process to study the project and give local taxpayers a chance to vote on the proposal.

The Maine Heritage Policy Center urges the committee to vote, "Ought to Pass" on LD 1651. Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I'll be happy to take questions.