



The Maine Heritage Policy Center Testimony to Oppose LD 2021 “An Act To Provide Funding for Broadband Internet Infrastructure in Unserved and Underserved Areas”

Senator Lawrence, Representative Berry and distinguished members of the Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology, my name is Adam Crepeau. I serve as a policy analyst at The Maine Heritage Policy Center. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to LD 2021.

To start, I want to emphasize that The Maine Heritage Policy Center believes expanding broadband access in Maine is an important public policy goal to ensure Mainers can compete in the 21st century. However, we disagree that expending public funds and increasing the size and scope of government are the best means to achieve that goal.

This bill would provide \$15 million to the ConnectME Authority in fiscal year 2020-21. The Authority is already slated to receive a funding increase for years to come starting this month—the state budget diverted a 10 cent surcharge on telephone lines to the ConnectME Fund that will generate \$1.9 million annually for the Authority.¹ The surcharge nearly doubles the Authority’s annual revenue.² Put simply, ConnectME does not need additional funding.

Over the last 13 years, the ConnectME Authority has given out nearly \$13 million for broadband infrastructure and more than \$600,000 for community planning projects.³ The appropriation in this bill would give the Authority, an entity that no longer requires legislative oversight for rulemaking, more funds in a single fiscal year than it has produced since its inception.⁴ We believe lawmakers should wait to see what outcomes the Authority can produce with its newfound funds and evaluate whether taxpayer dollars should be allocated from the General Fund for this purpose.

In reality, Mainers’ hard-earned tax dollars should not be appropriated for broadband expansion — they should be used for government’s core functions, such as helping the state’s truly needy and fixing our roads and bridges. Also, throwing taxpayer dollars at a quasi-government agency

¹<https://bangordailynews.com/2019/07/23/news/bangor/giving-all-of-maine-access-to-internet-could-cost-more-than-1-billion/>

² <https://mainepolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/LD-31-Tesimony-129th.pdf>

³ <https://www.maine.gov/connectme/grants/award-recipients>

⁴ <https://legislature.maine.gov/legis/bills/getPDF.asp?paper=HP0032&item=3&snum=129>

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does not guarantee broadband expansion efforts will improve or that these public funds will be spent effectively. For those reasons, The Maine Heritage Policy Center urges the committee to vote, "Ought Not to Pass" on LD 2021. Thank you.