

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF LD 256 (HP 189)  
“An Act To Ensure Continued Availability of High-speed Broadband Internet at Maine's Schools and  
Libraries”  
BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY, UTILITIES AND TECHNOLOGY  
FEBRUARY 14, 2017

I wish to be recorded in strong support for LD 256, “An Act To Ensure Continued Availability of High-speed Broadband Internet at Maine's Schools and Libraries.” Many thanks to Representative Grohman for his introduction and support of this legislation.

Public libraries are institutions that inspire transformation and growth, and have embodied this in their own adaptation to the digital world. While books and print materials remain a steadfast pillar of library service, digital access has quickly secured an important place in library offerings. Broadband access is not a given to all people, whether urban or rural, the cost of access (both subscription and hardware) are beyond the means of many—a fact that is often invisible to privileged subscribers. Libraries must fill this gap in the deepening digital divide if they are able to remain a place that offers democratic access to information. The ability to even exist as a citizen—file taxes, apply for jobs or disability, seek housing—relies on a broadband connection, which libraries must be able to provide.

The MSLN network is an ideal example of Maine schools and libraries working together to proffer solutions to a shared problem. But without changing the law, the overwhelming cost of broadband service will come at the expense of MSLN participants (and ultimately, the users of libraries and schools themselves), as access to other services is reduced or removed to balance the new price. Whether that is in the form of removing physical books, cutting back on technology hardware, or staff salaries, the gap in revenue from MTEAF is too much for MSLN to reasonably accommodate.

As an avid library user, a former public librarian, and staunch supporter of free access to information, I urge you to consider the ramifications of not passing this bill. Declining funding not only harms schools, libraries and public access to information in the present day, but will ensure these institutions are priced out of future developments for better broadband access. In a time when access to truth and knowledge is becoming a critical component of citizenship, Maine needs to ensure we are a state that supports freedom and demonstration of democratic activity. A vote in favor of LD 256 would be a prudent measure that ensures an optimistic outlook for future generations to freely access and explore the depths of human knowledge. Without changing the law Mainers will be losing access to information, whether directly through the loss of broadband access, or indirectly through the loss of access to other library and school resources that are cut to make up for the broadband funding.

I encourage you to think through the necessity of the MTEAF funding that supports public access to information—both public school students and teachers, and public library patrons. This is a concrete example of where you can put a price on freedom—so please, pass this bill and be confident that you are ensuring free access to information and knowledge.

In gratitude and respect,  
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