

Testimony in support of LD 256: *An Act To Ensure Continued Availability of High-speed Broadband Internet at Maine's Schools and Libraries*

Presented by Nancy E. Crowell, Director of Scarborough Public Library

Hearing before the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities & Technology, February 14, 2017

Chairperson Woodsome, Chairperson Berry, Members of the Committee,

My name is Nancy Crowell, and I am Library Director of the Scarborough Public Library.

The Scarborough Public Library had the good fortune of being the first public library to serve as a test site for the Maine School and Library Network in the early 1990s. So I've watched the MSLN grow from our ground breaking 56K connection to our current cloud-based infrastructure that requires broadband speed.

What has not changed are the fundamental values that made MSLN truly visionary for its time. The Legislature's message was to create a project that would serve all citizens, state-wide, regardless of phone access or economic status. We were to support information access to our citizens by providing adequate, up-to-date equipment, managed and guided by trained and professional information specialists.

I believe we have created an infrastructure and a service model that has become essential to our citizens.

The public library is our community's information safety net.

Our libraries have become trusted, service centers for online training, tax filing, and employment applications. State and federal agencies rely on the free Internet access available at public libraries to distribute forms, public service announcements, and public records. Our staff is available to assist those who do not have the skills or the technology to utilize these basic services.

MSLN has also provided a collaborative framework for us to share on-line resources in a breadth that would be cost prohibitive for individual schools and libraries or smaller consortia. These databases and learning opportunities serve students, businesses, and life-long learners in every part of the state.

For us and members of our community the MSLN connection is more than just an information network, it's a community connection, with real tangible value.

The MSLN enabled us to offer immediate assistance to a dozen businesses when their office complex burned two years ago. One business estimated they were able to save thousands of dollars in lost wages and business interruptions by having our network available to contact clients, submit insurance claims, and file payroll.

When a local business needed to downsize, we attended a meeting with Department of Labor's Rapid Response team to explain the resources offered through the Library and MSLN.

We have daily validation that the high-speed Internet access provided by the Maine School and Library Network is important to our citizens. It is a unique collaboration with the University, schools and public libraries.

I ask that the Committee support this legislation to provide a funding base that affirms the importance and excellent value of the Maine School and Library Network.