



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

2 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002

(207) 287-1400

TTY: (207) 287-4469

Martin J. Grohman

9 Lisa Lane
Biddeford, ME 04005
Residence: (207) 283-1476
Martin.Grohman@legislature.maine.gov
www.growmaine.me

Testimony in Support of LD 256

Imagine taking on a job search today without the internet. Or looking for a new home or apartment. Even if you have internet on your phone, that's hard to do - let alone advancing your career by taking an online class or working remotely. And how important is it for students today to have access to high speed internet? Yet access to all of those opportunities is publicly available, thanks to the Maine School and Library Network (MSLN), which has brought internet access to every school and library in Maine since 1996. Even though it is sometimes taken for granted, the Maine School and Library Network really is the jewel of Maine's broadband internet.

And this is not dial up. MSLN features some of the fastest speeds around. That's right - nearly every school and library in Maine can boast of 100 megabits per second symmetrical internet with many connecting at 1000 megabits per second. Typical home and business internet speeds are much slower, especially on the upload side. And at our schools, with hundreds of students using the service, that speed is even more important.

In Biddeford, Library Director Jeff Cabral said: "MSLN connectivity is the backbone to everything we do and ongoing sustainable funding for this would be of paramount importance. So many individuals rely on our public internet connection every day."

But the MSLN is not just for larger cities like Biddeford - it also reaches the smallest towns, providing internet access to approximately 950 schools and libraries statewide. For example, the very beautiful town of Weld, located in our western mountains region, is in a rural area without high speed internet. The high speed wifi makes the library a vital entity and a critical part of the community.

However, funding for MSLN is declining. State funding comes from the Maine Telecommunications Education Access Fund, which is supported by a fixed surcharge on in-state calls. These state funds are augmented by a federal contribution from the FCC's E-Rate program - created by Senator Olympia Snowe - with a more than 2 to 1 match. As times change, and Mainers make fewer phone calls (and use more text and data), the revenues supporting MSLN have declined. We need to find a new, stable source of funding that responds to these changes.

The MSLN is an immense bargain, reaching our entire state and providing connectivity in schools and libraries for Mainers from all walks of life: students, job seekers, and seniors, in rural areas and cities, for only \$4 million a year. Won't you join me in supporting this important legislation to provide a stable funding source for this critical program?