
TELECOMMUNICATIONS ASSOCIATION OF MAINE

Benjamin M. Sanborn

P.O. Box 5347 Augusta ME 04330

TEL: (207) 314-2609

E-MAIL: Ben@SanbornEsq.com

February 14, 2017

Senator David Woodsome, Senate Chair
Representative Seth Berry, House Chair
Members of the Energy, Utilities and Technology Committee
128th Maine Legislature
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Re: LD 256, An Act To Ensure Continued Availability of High-speed Broadband Internet at Maine's Schools and Libraries

The Telecommunications Association of Maine (TAM) offers the following comments in opposition to LD 256, "An Act To Ensure Continued Availability of High-speed Broadband Internet at Maine's Schools and Libraries".

TAM is opposed to this legislation not because we oppose the underlying goal of maintaining a vibrant school and library broadband network, but rather because we oppose the continued use of voice customer telephone bills as a funding source for what is clearly and unequivocally a broadband program. This bill is before this Committee because the amounts being collected under the existing Maine Telecommunications Educations Access Fund (MTEAF) structure have been steadily declining as a result of customers going away from voice service and to new modes of communication. The solution contained in this Bill is to impose a higher burden on those remaining voice customers. The bill also includes language that would direct the Commission to convene a study group. However, by its nature, the Commission is a body that is focused on regulated voice services. TAM is concerned that directing the Commission to study solutions would retain the burden on regulated customers.

Given the broadband nature of this program, TAM believes that it would be more appropriate to relocate the program to the ConnectME Authority. The easiest way to accomplish this would be to eliminate the MTEAF surcharge and increase the ConnectME Fund surcharge by an appropriate amount with funds explicitly earmarked for use by Schools and Libraries to supplement E-Rate support. TAM believes there should still be a stakeholder group convened to propose further statutory changes that may be necessary, with the Committee retaining authority to report out legislation next session based on the stakeholder group report. However, TAM believes this should be convened under the ConnectME Authority, as the diverse membership of the Authority will provide the broadest range of potential solutions to ensure that our schools and libraries continue to provide students and patrons with high quality broadband service.

TAM has been working with NetworkMaine, the Maine State Library, the Department of Education, and the University of Maine System to try to craft an amendment that will work for all parties. All of the ideas set forth in these comments have been raised with these other groups, and we are continuing our discussions in the hope that we can come to a mutually acceptable agreement prior to the work session on this bill.

Accordingly, TAM urges this Committee to vote OUGHT NOT TO PASS on LD 256, "An Act To Ensure Continued Availability of High-speed Broadband Internet at Maine's

Schools and Libraries” as drafted. However, we would ask that the parties be given sufficient time prior to the work session to attempt to craft an acceptable solution to the issues underlying this legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "B. Sanborn". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Benjamin M. Sanborn, Esq.
Telecommunications Association of Maine