



TOPSHAM PUBLIC LIBRARY

February 14, 2017

Senator Woodsome, Representative Berry and Committee members, my name is Susan Preece, and I am the Director of the Topsham Public Library. I am here to speak in support of LD 256.

The Topsham Public Library serves the 9,900 residents of the Town of Topsham which includes young couples, families, four schools, large and small businesses, self-employed entrepreneurs and a significant senior population. As you know, public libraries in Maine receive funding in a variety of ways. In Topsham, we receive 85% of our budget mostly through property tax and 15% through the library's independent fundraising. One of the most important services we provide is Internet access through the Maine School Library Network (MSLN.) For the first time last year, we were assessed a fee to participate in MSLN. This fee must come from scarce budget funds or fundraising efforts.

In a world that is increasingly dependent on the Internet for everyday activities like research and school work, employment applications, connecting to medical professionals, accessing banking, retirement and other services, the MSLN connection provides economy of scale and high-speed access for all. Stabilizing the costs of MSLN through LD 256 will allow us to continue to provide service for Topsham.

Now, more than ever, we see that there are "haves" and "have nots" in our community. The public library plays an important role in leveling the playing field for the underserved. Despite the seeming ubiquity of smartphones, it is hard to research, write a paper, apply for Medicare or fill out a job application on your smartphone. We have seen an increase of more than 10% in the use of public computers and 25% use of WIFI at the library in the past two years alone.

A quick search reveals that 10 Megabits per second (Mbps) download speed which is the average speed needed for email and reading text files, from the carriers in our area cost between \$ 35 and \$ 50 per month. This is primarily DSL (digital subscriber lines) through an already aged telephone system. High-speed access allows for the most efficient use of online content. In Topsham, the local cable provider offers services which must be bundled with telephone or TV service (or both) which can cost easily over \$120 a month and is getting more expensive as time goes on. The MSLN network is the fastest in the area and the only Internet access many residents have.

Working families struggle to make ends meet; retirees are living longer and running out of money faster than expected. They are not able to afford Internet- let alone high speed access at home. The public library helps level the playing field as it has done throughout history by providing resources for all. Please support LD 256 and stabilize the funding so that we can continue to serve the "haves" and "have nots." Working together, we can continue to provide high-speed Internet access, which has become as important as electricity and running water in our communities.

Thank you for your kind attention and the hard work you do for all of us.

Susan M. Preece
Director