



**Testimony to the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology**  
**Neither for, Nor Against**  
**LD 1894, An Act To Support Municipal Broadband Infrastructure through**  
**Incentives and Competition**

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Senator Lawrence, Representative Berry and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology:

My name is Amy Winston, and I am the State Policy Director at Coastal Enterprises, Inc. (CEI). I live in Edgecomb and am submitting testimony on behalf of CEI, **neither for nor against**, LD 1894, *An Act To Support Municipal Broadband Infrastructure through Incentives and Competition*.

CEI is a nonprofit, community development financial institution (CDFI) founded in 1977 with a mission to grow good jobs, environmentally sustainable enterprises and shared prosperity in Maine and rural regions throughout the US. CEI integrates financing, business and industry expertise and policy solutions to build an economy that lifts all people. We envision a world in which communities are economically and environmentally healthy, enabling all people, especially those with low incomes, to reach their full potential. We invest in critical infrastructure that is needed to boost shared prosperity, such as fast Internet access, child care and affordable housing.

We applaud this bill in incentivizing access to broadband by repurposing the Municipal Gigabit Broadband Network Access Fund. However, we understand that broadband utility districts are already allowed in statute, thereby making Section 1 redundant. Therefore, even if the intention is to make this clearer to encourage their formation, it is unnecessary.

Where we see added value in this bill, is in its activation of this existing fund to create access to matching funds for state/federal grants and to ensure public access to internet and critical services such as telehealth, job training and distance education, and extend municipal and county services through anchor institutions in unserved communities. This is an innovation of existing policy that will foster development of open networks. This will also help Maine businesses to market their services and products regardless of their location in rural settings.

The ConnectMaine Authority is well suited to defining “unserved community anchor institutions and to define project service areas in the context of its existing network development planning and implementation and digital equity objectives in that work. There is still the question of appropriating resources for this Fund; however, with a sharper focus and the ability to support grant match, this bill brings its use closer to being a reality. There is currently a lot of regional planning underway that will result in implementation projects in the next couple of years. As we know, broadband infrastructure and access is so vital to Maine’s people, small businesses, communities, and overall economy.