

*129th Legislature*  
*Senate of*  
*Maine*  
*Senate District 11*  
*Waldo County*

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Testimony Presenting LD 2021

An Act To Provide Funding for Broadband Internet Infrastructure in Unserved and Underserved Areas

Good afternoon Sen. Lawrence, Rep. Berry and distinguished members of the Energy, Utilities and Technology Committee. My name is Erin Herbig. In the Maine Senate, I proudly represent the people of all 26 towns in Waldo County: Belfast (my hometown), Belmont, Brooks, Burnham, Frankfort, Freedom, Islesboro, Jackson, Knox, Liberty, Lincolnville, Monroe, Montville, Morrill, Northport, Palermo, Prospect, Searsmont, Searsport, Stockton Springs, Swanville, Thorndike, Troy, Unity, Waldo, and Winterport.

Thank you for the opportunity to present LD 2021, "An Act To Provide Funding for Broadband Internet Infrastructure in Unserved and Underserved Areas."

We all know that our changing economy presents us with challenges. Too many Mainers and too many rural towns have been left behind. That is unacceptable.

One of the most significant barriers to success in rural Maine is the lack of access to reliable, high-speed internet.

In Waldo County, it is not uncommon to see kids parked outside a town library or high school at 9:00 or 10:00 at night trying to complete homework or a college application because that is the only place they can connect to the internet. I am not okay with that.

Nor is it uncommon for a farmer to come in from the fields once the sun sets only to have to wait several hours to send invoices to their customers in the middle of the night, because that's when the internet is the fastest. I am not okay with that either.

Businesses consider leaving Waldo County because of the lack of high-speed internet. Houses stay on the market because those homes are not connected to the internet and potential buyers need to be able to work from home. And when a group of young families in Frankfort forms a group to organize for access to high-speed internet so they can remain in their home town and encourage others to do the same, there are no resources to support their good work.

This problem might be hard to understand unless you live it every day. At my home, I do not have access to high-speed internet. My family uses a cellular hot spot to conduct work from home and do homework. It is our only option.

Depending on how much data we have used that month, I sometimes can't open a Google Doc or email a photo because my connection is too slow. At those times, I go to a library, school, or café to do my job, just like thousands of other Mainers in this same situation in rural parts of our state.

Lack of access to reliable, high-speed internet creates an incredible barrier to education, business growth, and economic activity in Waldo County and all rural, underserved parts of Maine.

Access to high-speed internet in today's economy is a utility, just as important as electricity or roads to access markets and participate in the economy.

That's why I'm introducing LD 2021, which will create an important foundation for expanding access to reliable, high-speed internet access across Maine's most underserved and rural areas.

It is time for the state to invest in rural Maine's economic future, and access to reliable, high-speed internet in rural areas is arguably the most important aspect of that investment.

This bill would disburse 15 million to the ConnectME Authority to expand internet access in rural Maine.

This session, let's empower rural communities to build independent, long lasting infrastructure that will bring back some of the Maine families we have lost.

High-speed internet access is a fundamental part of that infrastructure.

Thank you for your consideration, and I'd be happy to answer any questions.

## An Act To Provide Funding for Broadband Internet Infrastructure in Unserved and Underserved Areas

Be it enacted by the People of the State of Maine as follows:

**Sec. 1. Appropriations and allocations.** The following appropriations and allocations are made.

~~CONNECTME~~ CONNECTMAINE AUTHORITY

~~Municipal Gigabit Broadband Network Access Fund Z196~~  
ConnectMaine Authority Fund Z245-01

Initiative: Appropriates funds to the ~~ConnectME~~ ConnectMaine Authority for the provision of broadband Internet infrastructure in unserved and underserved areas.

GENERAL FUND	2019-20	2020-21
All Other	\$0	\$15,000,000
GENERAL FUND TOTAL	<u>\$0</u>	<u>\$15,000,000</u>

### SUMMARY

This bill appropriates \$15,000,000 from the General Fund to the ~~ConnectME~~ ConnectMaine Authority for the provision of broadband Internet infrastructure in unserved and underserved areas.