



January 27, 2021

Testimony of AARP Maine in support of Broadband Funding in LD 42, An Act Making Certain Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government.

Good afternoon Senator Breen, Representative Pierce, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs,

My name is Lori Parham and I am the State Director for AARP Maine. Today I am representing both AARP Maine and the Maine Broadband Coalition in voicing our support of Governor Mills' proposal to add \$1.8 million to Maine's supplemental budget to be allocated for broadband mapping and technical support.

Now, more than ever, Maine families and businesses need access to reliable, affordable high speed internet. We must invest in mapping and technical support in order to best understand the infrastructure needs, which will ensure we can expand access quickly.

Results from the Fall 2019 Critical Insights on Maine survey found that:

- Three out of four surveyed voters support partnerships between governments and others to expand high-speed internet in Maine.
- Eight out of ten voters believe that elected officials in Maine should ensure that high-speed internet is available to underserved areas in the state. Half strongly agree that elected officials should ensure broadband is available.
- Eight out of ten voters in Maine support state incentives to expand high-speed internet service to unserved areas of the state. Half of all voters strongly support such incentives.

The COVID-19 pandemic has clearly demonstrated the need for high-speed internet for safe access to telehealth and telemedicine options, for connections with loved ones through email and social media, and for caregivers who need to access services and support for those in their care. Small business owners will have better opportunities to connect with customers and enhance their services if they have access to broadband. Students at all grade levels deserve an equal opportunity to learn remotely. A good broadband connection can also decrease loneliness and depression by allowing Mainers to be connected to each other and allow services such as free captioned telephone services for the hard of hearing.

As a member of the Maine Broadband Coalition, AARP Maine strongly supports the state devoting the necessary funds to properly map current broadband access and provide technical support. All of us need to connect with one another and be part of a wider community, but for older Mainers, staying connected is especially important. We cannot afford to wait any longer.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Lori Parham

AARP Maine State Director