

Testimony of

Telecommunications Association of Maine (TAM), Charter Communications and Comcast

LD 221, An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government, General Fund and Other Funds and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2021, June 30, 2022 and June 30, 2023

February 24, 2021

Senator Breen, Senator Lawrence, Representative Pierce, Representative Berry and members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Energy, Utilities and Technology. We are writing in support of LD221 Part AA on behalf of the Telecommunications Association of Maine, Charter Communications and Comcast.

High speed internet is critical to our daily lives – now more than ever. While 95% of Mainers have access to a minimum broadband speed of 25x3 Mbps there is still work to be done whether that is through extending services for people to get access to the Internet and supporting residents to help them get access through a federal or state subsidy program.

Part AA of the proposed biennial budget clarifies that the Connect Maine 10 cent surcharge applies to all entities that pay into the E911 fund, including wireless providers. The Part AA proposal also provides an opportunity to further simplify and streamline customer bills by transitioning the separate .25% fee into a flat fee applicable to ALL providers. This flat fee will accomplish the following:

- Simplifies fees on consumer bills; single surcharge that applies to all providers
- Provides more consistency for budgeting (flat fee rather than a percentage)
- Simplifies reporting
- Provides parity among providers and is competitively neutral

Consumers use of wired and wireless technologies is quickly evolving, the lines between wireless and wireline are irrelevant to customers, who just wish to connect to the Internet. Indeed, wireless providers are integral partners in the broadband environment. In comments to the FCC made on February 16, 2021, the Wireless Industry representatives, led by CTIA, requested direct payments from the E-Rate program to enable wireless providers to offer broadband service to students.¹ When the initial Connect ME Surcharge was established in 2005, wireless providers argued that they did not wish to receive public dollars to support their internet service offerings, which were limited at the time. Accordingly they argued a wireless provider should only be part of the program if they voluntarily chose to participate so they could receive support to provide internet service. The wireless industry is seeking public dollars to provide internet service in Maine. The arguments from 15 years ago about wireless providers not being data providers is simply no longer true. To support broadband in Maine everyone involved in the provision of broadband connections must contribute in a competitively neutral manner. We believe this fee should come from general revenues and not surcharges on customers however if there is a fee it should be a flat fee with the same amount applicable to all.

We look forward to working with the Committees and the Governor's office on this proposal.

¹ *Wireline Competition Bureau Seeks Comment on Petitions for Emergency Relief to Allow the Use of E-rate Funds to Support Remote Learning During the COVID-19 Pandemic*, WC Docket No. 21-31, Comments of CTIA dated February 16, 2021.

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Charter Communications

Submitted on the behalf of Telecommunications Association of Maine; Charter Communications and Comcast.