



SUPPORT

Senator Lawrence, Representative Zeigler, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology,

My name is Kiera Reardon, and I am the State Policy & Agency Partnerships Manager of the Maine Connectivity Authority. Today, I testify in support of LD 1967, "An Act to Support Municipal Franchise Agreements," as drafted in the sponsor's amendment. We thank the sponsor for her work to refine this bill with input from multiple state agencies and stakeholders.

Franchise agreements are important for municipalities as they allow towns and cities the ability to ensure their residents equitable access to services. It is true that video service providers and cable television are not within MCA's purview; however, high-speed internet provided across the cable network does offer a quality internet connection to many Mainers who would be otherwise unserved. LD 1967 seeks to clarify the existing §3008, sub-§5.B.line extension standard. Doing so would help us achieve our primary goal of expanding effective, accessible connectivity in every part of the state.

The changes to the line extension standard in subsection 5.B provide needed clarification to the 15 premises per mile standard. MCA has conducted a review of franchise agreements and service availability in the towns of Woolwich, Dresden, and Greene. Across these communities, using the 15 premises per mile standard from where cable ends, 243 premises were deemed unserved. During the review, some locations have been acknowledged as an obligation within the franchise agreement, while others were deemed outside of scope based on the perception of the statute. Municipalities interpret the current language as a strand mile measured from the end of the current cable system installed (similar to the clarifying language in this bill). At the same time, the network operators tend to read the current statute as a strand mile measured from the end of where upgrades need to occur to reach the newly established homes to provide proper service (often a node). Operators and municipalities clearly interpret the existing statute differently, resulting in premises left unconnected that franchise managers feel should be connected. The bill addresses the discrepancy by refining the language to specify that the line extension measurement begins where the current cable system ends and not from the point in the network needing upgrades to serve the line extension. This would bring service to more Maine residents without the need for additional grant funding to do so.

Universal, equitable and affordable access to services is a guiding principle for MCA, and the proposed amendments ensure that franchise managers and network operators are clear in the service offerings to Maine residents. This is a sound policy which contributes to better access to information. Thank you for your consideration and attention to this issue. The Maine Connectivity Authority will be available for the work session.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kiera Reardon".

Maine Connectivity Authority