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Testimony of Nancy Smith, Executive Director of GrowSmart Maine

in support of LD 1563, “An Act Encourage the Development of Broadband Coverage in Rural Maine”

January 21, 2020

Senator Lawrence, Representative Berry and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology, my name is Nancy Smith and I am the Executive Director of GrowSmart Maine. We are a statewide non-partisan organization working to create lasting prosperity without sacrificing the quality of life that defines Maine.

We support policies, programs and projects that define and protect the value of our unique built and natural places while supporting long term economic opportunity.

As a member of the Maine Broadband Coalition (MBC) steering committee, GrowSmart Maine speaks for the MBC in strongly supporting the proposed amendment to flesh out the concept bill wording of LD 1563. The draft amendment accomplishes several important changes:

- First, the amendment renames ConnectME as the ConnectMaine Authority. Similarly, it renames the ConnectME Advisory Council and the ConnectME Fund by replacing “ConnectME” with “ConnectMaine”. While seemingly cosmetic, these name changes help improve the authority’s marketability by more explicitly connecting with the state’s name and by adopting a more professional and inclusive tone;
- Second, the amendment provides more flexibility to the authority in its efforts to collect necessary data crucial to the authority’s ability to accomplish the Statewide Broadband Policy; and
- Third, the amendment eliminates certain unnecessary and burdensome requirements for those communities wishing to engage in community broadband planning.

Given the significant and multiple statutory duties of ConnectME which include promoting the use of broadband service, supporting local and regional broadband planning, supporting broadband investment and facilitating the state support of deployment of broadband infrastructure, it is clear to us in the MBC, that the overall effort to increase the availability of broadband services on a statewide basis deserves support for any clarifications in the statutory mission and responsibilities of ConnectME.

Of course, the more dire need for ConnectME and the effort to significantly expand broadband service throughout the state is for more funding. The MBC plans to address the need for more funding in other legislation which is being considered by the Legislature during this session. In the meantime, the MBC strongly urges you to support the necessary changes proposed in the draft amendment.

Please do not hesitate to contact me or other members of the MBC with any questions that you may have regarding our strong support for the draft amendment to LD 1563.