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Testimony by Nancy for GrowSmart Maine
in support of LD 1555 "An Act To Fund Broadband Internet
Infrastructure for
Marginalized Groups in the State"

April 27, 2021

Senator Lawrence, Representative Berry, and Members of the Joint Legislative Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology, I am Nancy Smith, I live in Monmouth, and am Executive Director for GrowSmart Maine. I also serve on the Advisory Committee for the Maine Broadband Coalition and lead its Policy Committee.

GrowSmart Maine is a statewide organization devoted building lasting prosperity while protecting the quality of life that defines Maine. We support policies, programs and projects that value our unique built and natural places while supporting long term economic opportunity. Our support for LD 1555 comes from this perspective.

As I noted in last week's [op ed](#), affordable internet access does not guarantee a sustainable future, but the lack of it will stymie any other efforts to advance economic opportunities for all. This bill squarely addresses that key component of sound broadband policy, **economic opportunity for all**. Equitable access must be at the foundation of efforts to bring broadband to all Mainers.

LD 1555 highlights the point that fully engaging historically underrepresented populations requires additional effort, starting by building trusted relationships. It should be clear that we all benefit when this effort is successful. Prosperity is not a finite resource; it can and should be cultivated to include all of us. How to achieve this goal will, I hope, be the topic of thoughtful committee discussion that includes the representative organizations mentioned in the bill.

I can offer from GrowSmart Maine and Maine Broadband Coalition perspectives that incorporating underrepresented populations into municipal and regional efforts will be far more effective than creating a separate silo of such work. BUT deliberate processes must be in place to ensure every proposal received by ConnectMaine includes solutions to providing affordable internet access to these populations. Having just read the new language for LD 1848, I did not see language specific to equity, and suggest that the annual report to the Legislature noted in that bill include such language.

I also encourage the organizations noted in the bill and those people they represent to join and actively engage in the Maine Broadband Coalition. We are all learning together, and the Coalition is stronger when it is as broad as possible.

I appreciate the chance to offer our perspective on this bill.

Best,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Nancy E. Smith". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Nancy E Smith