



July 13, 2021

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Maine Legislature
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Re: Maine Connectivity Confirmation Hearings

The following written testimony is submitted on behalf of the Midcoast Internet Coalition, a group of approximately a dozen Maine municipalities committed to a regional broadband utility to deliver high-speed internet. The goals we support as Coalition members include: (1) open access with consumer choice and lower cost through competition; (2) universal access that includes all homes and businesses within the service region; (3) building municipally owned state-of-the-art fiber optic infrastructure with internet services delivered by professional Internet Service Providers (ISPs); and (4) creation of local skilled jobs through a homegrown workforce.

The regional utility was legally established, pursuant to State law, as of June 2021 as the Midcoast Internet Development Corporation (MIDC). The creation of the regional utility had the overwhelming support of the voters in the first five municipalities adopting it: 91% of Camden voters, 79% of Rockport voters, and 82% of Thomaston voters. Additionally, the residents of Cushing and South Thomaston voted at their annual meetings to authorize adoption of the MIDC, in some cases by unanimous vote of those present.

Importantly, the regional utility will be funded without local taxes or increases in our mil rates. To achieve success, we must raise significant seed money, and seek municipal loans and / or issue revenue bonds. The more funds the utility raises without debt, the broader its service region will be, benefitting more Maine residents and businesses. Unlike the profits that are directed to corporate shareholders, revenues and profit will be re-invested into the fiber optic network's expansion.

For too long Maine residents have suffered from the decisions of large telecoms and cable providers who cherry-pick the most densely populated areas and leave other residents and businesses behind. Maine deserves better.

While we support the creation of the Maine Connectivity Authority, we believe that the legislative makeup of the Board has a totally inadequate number of "slots" for community representatives. This is unfortunate given the fact that more than 50 municipalities in Maine are pursuing a municipal / regional broadband direction as authorized by Maine state law. We have listed those associations and coalitions of which we are aware, as well as the individual towns below to illustrate this point. This is not only a trend in the State of Maine – it is a movement – and one that urgently needs the financial support of the Maine Connectivity Authority.

We believe it is essential that during the confirmation hearings for the nominees that the nominees be questioned about their views on the following:

1. Their support for municipal and regionally owned broadband infrastructure;
2. Their support for using taxpayer funds to be used for building privately-owned infrastructure;
3. Their support for using taxpayer funds to build publicly owned infrastructure while partnering with privately owned companies to build the infrastructure and to deliver internet services over that infrastructure.

Why These Questions are Fundamental

- Question #1 - Candidates who do not support funding of municipal and regionally owned infrastructure should be disqualified from serving on the MCA Board of Directors. The Maine State legislature has statutorily authorized municipalities to build municipally owned infrastructure individually or through regional utilities. Having authorized them – the State of Maine should also help to fund them. The MCA Board should not be permitted to undercut what the State Legislature has adopted.
- Question #2 - In the hundreds of discussions we have had across the State of Maine, the resounding message and universally held view of municipal leaders and voters is that taxpayer funds should not result in privately-owned infrastructure. For example, the CARES Act provided 100% funding for the build/equipment/labor to build broadband infrastructure. During a pandemic, this was intended to get internet service to people who did not have it quickly. Paying private entities to build that infrastructure, employing their workers during the pandemic, and providing the infrastructure on which those ISPs could deliver internet services for years to come – would have been a sufficient incentive. Instead, the federal government allowed those private entities to own the infrastructure, dictate the terms of service going forward and prevent competitors from delivering better or less expensive internet services to those Maine consumers.
- Question #3 – We support the concept of public / private partnership. ISPs should build the networks and deliver services to our residents. They should not own the infrastructure when it is built with taxpayer funding. Like our roads and our railways, taxpayer funding should be used to build the infrastructure on which ISPs can compete to deliver services to our residents. This model allows ISPs to focus their capital on competition and delivering best-in-class services, not on infrastructure aimed at keeping their competitors out of the market.

Thank you for this opportunity to express the views of our municipal leaders and voters in support of using taxpayer funds to build municipally owned infrastructure.

Regards,
Debra J. Hall
Chair, Midcoast Internet Coalition
President, Midcoast Internet Development Corporation
Former Chair, Rockport Select Board

Midcoast Internet Coalition Municipal Members (11)

<https://midcoastinternet.com/>

Camden
Rockport
Rockland
Thomaston
Lincolntonville
Owls Head
Cushing
South Thomaston
Union

Hope
Northport

Illustrative list of other Maine Broadband Coalitions / Municipalities Focused on Municipal and Regional Broadband Efforts

Southwestern Waldo County Broadband Association (5)

<https://www.swwaldobroadband.org/>

Freedom
Liberty
Montville
Palermo
Searsmont

Western Kennebec Lakes Community Broadband Association (6)

<https://www.wklcba.org/>

Fayette
Leeds
Mount Vernon
Readfield
Wayne
Vienna

Downeast Broadband Utility (3)

Calais
Baileyville
Alexander

Katahdin Region Broadband Utility (3)

<https://katahdinbroadband.com/>

https://www.ourkatahdin.com/katahdin_region_broadband_utility_update

Millinocket
East Millinocket
Medway

Peninsula Broadband Coalition (3)

<https://sedgwickbroadband.org/peninsula-broadband-coalition/>

Brooklin
Brooksville
Sedgwick

Peninsula Utility for Broadband (4)

<https://www.peninsulautility4broadband.org/>

Penobscot
Blue Hill
Stonington
Deer Isle

Other municipalities in other counties are in the process of forming broadband coalitions or seeking to join/expand the Midcoast Internet Coalition for similar purposes, including Lincoln County.

Additionally, numerous other throughout the State of Maine have formed or are in the planning process to form municipal broadband networks. Fourteen (14) are included below for illustrative purposes:

Searsport

Ellsworth

Bar Harbor

Islesboro

Georgetown

Arrowsic

Roque Bluffs

Monhegan Island

Southport

Cranberry isles

Cliff Island

China

Hampden

Vinal Haven