



Maine Farm Bureau Association

“Working for You”

March 6, 2017

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, 2018 and June 30, 2019: Part W, Broadband Development Authority

Senator Hamper, Representative Gattine of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, Senator Woodson, Representative Berry, Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology, and esteemed members of both committees, thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of Part W, the Maine Broadband Development Authority. My name is Theresa Kelly. I am a retired IBM-er, a homesteader in Pownal, a State Director on the Board of the Cumberland County Farm Bureau and a member of the Executive Committee of the Maine Farm Bureau. Broadband for our rural communities is one of our organization's top priorities this year, as it has been for the last several years.

Maine is blessed with the investments it has already made into the Three Ring Binder project, as well as the Maine School and Libraries network. Both provide high capacity networking to many parts of our state. They were big projects with bold visions. But they are just a start in bringing Maine's networking capabilities into the 21st century and the truth is that the economic model for the “last mile” part of the network can't be supported by our rural areas: too little cash resources to invest themselves and too little population to bring in large amounts of user dollars. By their very nature, so many of our farms and our food producers, the ones that feed our cities and our families, as well as bring much needed revenue to their communities, are located in those unserved and underserved rural areas. What broadband plans are made available to them are frequently too costly or provide too little service for too much money.

Farming in Maine is a tale of 2 generations, one aging out far too quickly and a new young, highly educated one, bringing in expectations of connecting to the Internet to help them develop their markets, sell their products and connect to expertise. Ironically, it's very hard to make a good living providing the most important products that everybody needs multiple times per day. We need to help this group by bringing the Internet to our farmers' gates or we risk losing them.

The Broadband Development Authority envisioned in this budget is just a start. Other states have been much bolder, putting Broadband right in the Governor's office, which is where our organization thinks it should be. I urge you to move forward with this good first step. Thank you for your consideration.

Theresa Kelly, takosan3@icloud.com, 207-671-6138 (cell)