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March 1, 2017

Re: LD 423 - An Act To Extend Internet Availability in Rural Maine  
Testimony of Janet McKenney, Director, Library Development

Senator Woodsome, Representative Berry, and distinguished members of the Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology, my name is Janet McKenney, the Director of Library development at the Maine State Library and I would like to offer information for your consideration as you work on this bill.

In 2015 the Maine State Library was selected by the New York Public Library to take part in a rural demonstration of their multimillion dollar urban grant project funded by Google, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the Robin Hood Foundation and the Open Society Foundations. The Maine State Library and the Kansas State Library were provided \$50,000 sub-grants.

Six libraries in Washington County were selected to participate in this rural experiment. Linda Lord, he State Librarian at that time worked with school superintendents to determine the need for connectivity among students with MLTI laptops who lacked Internet connectivity at home due to lack of access or lack of funds. The project's intent was to fill the homework gap experienced by these students.

The Maine State Library worked with a local provider, Axiom Technologies, to set up a contract through the Maine State Library Friends organization with US Cellular for 80 devices to be used by the 6 libraries.

The grant funds are depleted at the end of this month, as well as the 2 year contract with US Cellular. The participating libraries and the Maine State Library have learned a lot from this project. In the past 2 years, hotspot lending programs are growing nationally as libraries "lend out" the Internet to patrons but in rural Maine, the high costs and small budgets do not allow the libraries in Washington County to continue this program nor expand the program to additional libraries in Washington County.

We all experience the lack of robust internet connectivity or any Internet connectivity through Maine. We all experience those drop zones. This program offered many students and their families much needed connectivity. The need is still there.

I have included with my testimony a copy of the "Starting A Mobile Hotspot Lending Program" produced by an IMLS research grant on the use of wireless hotspot lending programs nationally. The Institute of Museum and Library Services is the federal agency supporting state libraries, museums and library services nationally. They funded a \$493,000 grant to three Universities to collaborate and do research on this topic. The Maine libraries have been part of this ongoing research project. I hope this document provides some background on how these programs work.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have about the grant.



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