



Vicki Doudera

18 Trim Street
Camden, ME 04843
Residence: (207) 542-1990
Victoria.Doudera@legislature.maine.gov

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

2 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002
(207) 287-1400
TTY: MAINE RELAY 711

Testimony of Representative Victoria Doudera on LD 1432, "An Act To Update the Municipal Gigabit Broadband Network Access Fund"

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Good Afternoon Senator Lawrence, Representative Berry, and members of the Energy, Utilities and Technology Committee. I am Representative Vicki Doudera, and I represent House District 94, the towns of Camden, Islesboro and Rockport. I am here today to speak in support of **LD 1432, "An Act To Update the Municipal Gigabit Broadband Network Access Fund."**

Two of the towns that I represent are part of the Midcoast Internet Coalition, a group of nine Midcoast municipalities working to bring broadband to the Midcoast region through the creation of a regional utility, providing an open-access network with universal coverage, requiring a minimum 100 Mbps symmetrical speed, with all ISPs on the network required to provide 1 Gigabit symmetrical speed to any resident or business who requests it. In June the first two towns — Camden and Rockport — hope to have on their ballots the adoption of the interlocal agreement which will create the regional utility that will get this effort off the ground.

Midcoast Internet Coalition is modeling the structure on the approach used by Downeast Broadband Utility. The plan is to fund the effort largely through municipal loans and issuance of revenue bonds, as well as seed money through grants that might be available for our unserved members as well as private investment.

Because the Midcoast Internet Coalition is committed to funding the utility without taxpayer dollars that would raise mil rates, it is extremely important that the organization can seek grant funding from the ConnectMaine Authority where it is potentially available. What they are finding is that these unserved towns are being approached and heavily lobbied by local ISPs to

provide information sufficient so that the for-profit ISPs can seek and obtain the ConnectMaine funds for the expansion of their own networks in competition to the regional utility.

Last session I was proud to participate as a member of this committee in the public hearings and work sessions for several bills to encourage the development of broadband in rural and underserved areas, specifically LD 1563 and LD 1742. I was happy to support and vote for these bills, and pleased to see them pass and become law. But since then, we have discovered, through the experiences of groups like Midcoast Internet Coalition, that there are serious shortcomings in our broadband policy when it comes to the administration of ConnectMaine's grants, shortcomings that are tying the hands of the very communities we are striving to help.

LD 1432 will make some needed changes by amending the Municipal Gigabit Broadband Network Access Fund. I thank Representative Berry for bringing it forward, and I urge you to support it so that our municipalities can continue to connect.

Thank you and I am happy to answer any questions.