

## Committee on Small Business Subcommittee on Contracting and Infrastructure

### Committee Members:

My name is Chris Loughlin. I am testifying today on behalf of the Downeast Broadband Utility and have prepared this testimony with the assistance of our organization's President, Dan Sullivan. I also serve as Town Manager for Baileyville, which is one of two communities that will be served by the Downeast Broadband Utility open-access dark fiber network.

Since this committee is focused on infrastructure, we would like to address that first. Infrastructure has been critically ignored for over 30 years in the multiple broadband debates that have occurred over various government and private agencies. Like building a road, or expanding electricity the foundation needs to be in place first and foremost. Unfortunately, in Maine and throughout the country this critical basic infrastructure debate has been hijacked by incumbent Internet Service Providers more concerned with short term profit than long term public good. Were those dollars their private funds that would be understandable but that has not been the case. Millions of public dollars have found their way into private companies promoting their own brand of broadband. Maine and this country are yearning for better broadband. Were that not the case there would be no need for this hearing.

### Education:

A few broadband facts need to be understood:

1. The Internet backbone (the very heart of the system) is fiber. What is referred to as the "middle mile" is fiber. Where this country has dropped the ball is what is referred to as the "last mile". Rather than completing the fiber network to the home we have allowed private companies to set the agenda and use public funds to finish that final mile with DSL, Cable and fixed wireless Internet. These are all copper based technologies that are inadequate to the task. It seems incredible now to think that we have built world class fiber backbone networks only to miss the mark to our homes and businesses because we have allowed private companies to put their profits ahead of the American taxpayer.
2. The technology is actually pretty straight forward. As previously mentioned, the core of the Internet is fiber. Why isn't the rest of the network of the same technology?
3. Wireless keeps being touted, especially in hilly mountainous states like Maine but in reality, this does not work. The ConnectME organization an arm of Maine government has given over 10 million dollars to companies building these wireless networks as well as DSL and cable. Why does this hearing exist if these previous efforts were the solution?
4. A recent Post Road study in conjunction with the Roosevelt Institute concluded that in reality the cost of building all fiber to the home networks is actually more cost effective than trying to fix this issue with wireless solutions.

This committee from its very name is focused on “infrastructure”. In our president’s conversations with Congressman Golden he tried to make clear the need for all fiber to the home and business networks, especially when expending public funds. This fiber infrastructure needs to be in place much the same as electric cables were strung in the 30’s to bring electricity. Building all-fiber networks will position Maine (and this country) first in regard to world class future proof broadband.

We urge this committee not to go down the path of previous committees and allow incumbent companies that promote their own version of broadband to once again drive the debate and waste public funds.

The solution is simple. Ask any IT person. Build fiber and only fiber networks all the way from the source of the Internet directly to our homes and businesses and the problem is solved. Two thirds of this fiber network have already been accomplished. Backbone and middle mile are in place. This committee needs to focus on the last mile to our homes and businesses and make sure it is fiber.

We at Downeast Broadband Utility have done just that. The citizens of Calais and Baileyville have decided to secure the funds to build this fiber to the home network. Our network is close to completion with customers to sign up in the next week. Interest has been overwhelming.

If we can impart only one thought to carry away from this meeting it is, fiber from beginning to end. There is a lot of confusion around this technology but remember one thing. All technologies, whether it be cell towers, fixed wireless Internet, satellite, 4G, 5G etc., they all have to eventually connect to a fiber connection to get to the Internet. Build the hard-wired fiber networks to all our homes and businesses in Maine as Calais and Baileyville have and the problem is solved.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.