



**Written Testimony of Jess Maurer on Behalf of
The Maine Council on Aging
To Joint Standing Committee on
Health and Human Services**

Testimony in Support of LD 1148

Delivered in writing on April 5, 2021

Greetings Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health & Human Services:

My name is Jess Maurer. I'm the Executive Director of the Maine Council on Aging (MCOA). The MCOA is a broad, multidisciplinary network of more than 100 organizations, businesses, municipalities, and older Mainers working to make sure we can all live healthy, engaged, and secure lives with choices and opportunities as we age in our homes and communities. I am writing in support of LD 1148 Resolve, To Increase Broadband Access in Private Nonmedical Institutions (PNMIs).

Since March 16, 2020, the MCOA has been hosting weekly, and much later bi-weekly, calls with providers of all types, including healthcare and behavioral health providers, across Maine to share information about challenges related to the pandemic. By the end of March 2020, we started hosting similar weekly, and later monthly, calls specifically for congregate housing providers of low and affordable housing for older people. Uniformly, across the pandemic, and across provider types, access to broadband and to physical technology itself (computers, tablets, etc.) became the clear dividing line for the "haves" and "have nots" when it came to being able to stay connected and gain access to tele-health services.

People who reside in PNMIs necessarily have very little disposable income. In fact, they are allowed only \$70 per month for personal needs. Access to broadband is not a luxury; it's a required part of life these days, especially in a pandemic when our only access to preventative care came through tele-health. Broadband also creates opportunities for residents to connect with their family, increasing their emotional health, and access to evidence-based wellness programming and education. We encourage you to support LD 1148 as this bill that would make broadband available to PNMI residents at no cost.

Thank you.

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