

April 2, 2015

Senator Woodsome, Representative Dion and members of the Energy, Utilities and Technology Committee:

My name is Jon Olson. I am the Executive Secretary of Maine Farm Bureau, the state's largest general farm organization.

Maine Farm Bureau favors LD 826 – An Act To Promote Maine's Economic Development and Critical Communications for Rural Family Farms, Businesses and Residences by Strategic Public Investments in High Speed Internet.

Maine agriculture is a bright star for our state. Farming in Maine has grown, and Maine continues to lead the New England states with 8,174 farms; the value of Maine's crops and livestock grew 24% over the past 5 years. Maine's agricultural enterprises provide more than \$764 million through the sale of farm products and contribute more than \$2 billion annually to the State's economy, and Maine agricultural products are increasingly available locally in farmers' markets, schools and institutions.

When I started working for the Maine Farm Bureau 35 years ago, I can remember the latest technology to help farmers. It was a fax machine. The fax machine enabled the farmer to receive and place orders immediately, correspond with customers and vendors – those sorts of things. But it is important to remember all that a farmer needed was a land phone line and he was ready to go.

This technology mostly has been replaced by high speed internet. But the implementation of it is not as simple as having a land phone line. Farmers must rely on high speed internet infrastructure. And for 6% of Maine farmers, rural businesses and residences, this infrastructure is not available. The enactment of this bill that increases ConnectME Authority funding for high speed internet infrastructure investment will tremendously help these unserved Maine people. It is a question of fairness.

Thank you for your attention to the above. I'll be happy to answer any questions you may have.