



Northern Light Health
Government Relations
43 Whiting Hill Road
Brewer, Maine 04412

Office 207-861-3282
Fax 207-872-2030

Northern Light Health
Acadia Hospital
A.R. Gould Hospital
Beacon Health
Blue Hill Hospital
C.A. Dean Hospital
Eastern Maine Medical Center
Home Care & Hospice
Inland Hospital
Maine Coast Hospital
Mercy Hospital
Northern Light Health Foundation
Sebasticook Valley Hospital

May 13, 2019

U.S. Senator Susan Collins
413 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Collins,

On behalf of Northern Light Health member organizations and the patients we serve, I want to thank you for your support for the need to advance health care technology in Maine. Technology is an essential strategy to increase access to health care services in rural Maine. Northern Light Health is a technology leader in Maine providing a variety of telehealth services including cardiology, stroke, psychiatry, trauma, pediatric intensive care and in-home telemonitoring services state wide. As we work to expand opportunities for patients to receive health care services through technology we consistently encounter the challenge of inadequate (or absent) broad band capacity. Northern Light Health member organizations compete nationally to recruit specialists to Maine, technology is often the only option to expand access to specialists in rural Maine.

The following Northern Light Health examples highlight technology opportunities and the need to increase broadband speed and capacity in rural Maine.

- Our hospice program cared for a patient on an island off Hancock County. Staff placed a tablet at the patient's home and one with the hospice nurse. Because of the challenges of Island travel, it took hours to get to the home to manage and support the patient and her family. While the broadband connection was very poor we were able to help with symptoms and emotional support using video technology. Our hospice team could be doing so much more with video and telemonitoring technologies if Maine had better connectivity.
- At Northern Light AR Gould in Presque Isle, they are a pilot site for the telehealth virtual walk-in clinic. Those using the system within the pilot are amazed at the ease of access to a provider to ask those easy questions that keep patients out of the ED. If successful, in a broader roll-out, patients in local communities will have access to walk-in level care (colds, rashes, general health questions) without leaving their home via technology. This is important given the average age of the population

and the difficulty of traveling roads during the winter months in Aroostook County. The barrier to fully expanding the telehealth virtual clinic is broadband capacity.

- Broadband access is also a professional recruitment tool, often provider spouses have difficulty finding meaningful employment. Addressing rural broadband capacity will support remote work.
- In Aroostook County we are also evaluating telepsychiatry services for the regional nursing homes. This will significantly increase access to psychiatry services which is in clinical demand. Connectivity is a foundational component of offering this service.
- Our electronic health record has expanded access to individualized health information for our patients, connectivity is a barrier to patients accessing this important resource in rural Maine.
- As we increase our electronic health record capacity providers are reliant on this technology as much as they are reliant on clinical tools like a stethoscope. In areas with broadband capacity challenges the providers spend time looking at buffering symbols on their screens for long periods of time in the day.

We appreciate the opportunity to share these examples with you and your staff as you explore Congressional solutions to Maine's broadband challenge.

Sincerely,



Lisa Harvey-McPherson RN, MBA, MPPM
Vice President Government Relations.