



Connecticut Broadband Internet Coordinating Council

April 22, 2010

Sen. John W. Fonfara, Co-Chair
Rep. Vickie Orsini Nardello, Co-Chair
Committee Members
Energy & Technology Committee
Connecticut General Assembly

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Energy & Technology Committee on Tuesday, April 20th regarding the past two years of activities conducted by the **Connecticut Broadband Internet Coordinating Council**. The attention paid to our presentation and the astute questions posed were much appreciated. The BICC membership will be informed of the specific interests of the Committee leadership and members so we may further follow up on your concerns.

We were most impressed by the insights of Committee members, especially your appreciation that just as Connecticut needs a strong interstate highway system and viable mass transit, we require accessible and affordable broadband so that businesses and consumers can reap the benefits of broadband technology to efficiently and economically develop their reach across the state and the world. Indeed, similar to highways, bridges, and dams, broadband provides a greatly enhanced means for the state's businesses and residents to stay connected, innovate, and create jobs.

The Committee members' questions illustrated their concern that the public policies and implementation strategies adopted by the state in the next several years should lead to the creation of a broadband network that addresses the long-term sustainability of expanded broadband access, recognizing that state and private industry budgets rise and fall over time, and that technology always presents a moving target – changing the players, as well as the basic methods of broadband accessibility. Thus, the state's actions and policies must provide a flexible process for keeping abreast of the changing environment for broadband accessibility into the future.

It is apparent that Connecticut already enjoys an extremely high level of infrastructure capacity spread across the state, thus the focus of the effort to improve usage of broadband services must be on increasing competence and removing reluctance among potential new users. The suggestion to leverage community anchor institutions such as churches, schools, senior groups and the like is excellent and the BICC could be instrumental in reaching out to such groups and providing them with support and teaching materials.

As was generally agreed, we recognize that the state's financial situation currently precludes much direct financial investment by the state itself in expanding broadband infrastructure, PC centers, or sustainability projects. As we described, it is therefore important that the state focus on developing

public/private partnerships in order to maximize the benefit of competition and private investment with public policy goals to be encouraged by the state.

A central point of agreement among all parties is that it is critical that public policies not discourage the private investment needed to build broadband networks that will bring the state's capability up to national and global standards, while creating and maintaining jobs, and otherwise advancing key public policies. The BICC therefore proposes to continue to address multiple questions basically centered on enhancing access to broadband services, in the context of striking a balance between measures that are market-led and measures that are government-led. The BICC is uniquely qualified to be an established interface with the private providers of broadband services in order to address their concerns regarding their extensive sunk-cost investments and competition since much of its membership is currently providers of broadband services.

The state itself must determine how best to leverage its resources of data and expertise – utilizing existing state expenditures for agency expenses to improve interactions between state agencies, and by state agencies with citizens and businesses. For instance, all agencies of state government should boost use of broadband to reach all of the state's populations, thus providing greater access to state services and data, while enabling the agencies to increase interactions with citizens, encouraging civic engagement and enabling the creation of social capital. The BICC can also work with state agencies to coordinate broadband expansion with its neighboring states (e.g., New York, New England – particularly Massachusetts – which has unserved areas in the Berkshires similar to Connecticut's issues in the neighboring Litchfield Hills) in resolving broadband problems through joint programs.

Finally, the BICC can work with state agencies to develop a central information website (www.ct.gov/cbicc), which should include a web-based survey for gathering information on barriers to uptake, and focus on providing opportunities for companies, nonprofits, state and local governments, and "expert" individuals interested in teaming together to apply for federal stimulus money or otherwise complete projects, similar to the new federal "BroadbandMatch" site. This will function as an online service to help consumers find potential partners with whom to jointly apply for grants or other financial assistance. It would probably be useful for the BICC to partner with DECD and other business development entities to help coordinate partnering issues and locate funding and other resources available in the state. The BICC can also monitor and publish through its website, and other resources, links to the many federal efforts to help applicants navigate to the various funding and grant opportunities presented as the federal National Broadband Strategic Plan is implemented over the next few years. It will of course be critical that Connecticut avail itself of these opportunities in order to best leverage its own assets.

Sincerely,



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