The Committee on

Government Administration and Elections

H.B. 5027 *AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING THE ELIMINATION, CONSOLIDATION AND MODIFICATION OF VARIOUS BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS.*

March 2, 2012

Testimony of

The Office of Consumer Counsel

Elin Swanson Katz, Consumer Counsel

Presented by William L. Vallée Jr.,

CT Broadband Policy & Programs Coordinator

The Office of Consumer Counsel (OCC) has carefully reviewed **and supports** the provisions of this proposed bill in the following sections:

- Section 5, The Office of Policy and Management shall constitute a successor department to the Geospatial Systems Information Council in accordance with the provisions of sections 4-38d and 4-39.

and

- Sections 47-56 creating the Commission for Technology Advancement within the Office of Policy and Management.

The Consumer Counsel very much appreciates the opportunity to participate as a member in the new Commission for Technology Advancement. The OCC has specialized expertise and experience in the regulatory process affecting the Internet service providers active in Connecticut and hopes to support the efforts of the new Commission as the state government's principal technology advancement policy advisor in the development, oversight and direction of the attainment of state-wide technology advancement goals.

The OCC also has the state's Broadband Policy & Programs Coordinator on staff, a federally-funded position with responsibility to the federal and state governments to promote awareness concerning access to and adoption of broadband services across Connecticut. Using federal funds, the state's Broadband Coordinator, together with the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority, contracted with the Connecticut Academy of Science and Engineering (CASE) for the purposes of providing guidance—input and suggestions—for the state to use in its formulation of the state's strategic plan regarding enhancement of advanced technologies in this state.

After nearly two years of study and debate, the report from CASE was released December 31, 2011, entitled *Guidelines For The Development Of A Strategic Plan For Accessibility To And Adoption Of Broadband Services In Connecticut* (CASE Guidelines). A link to that report is provided as an appendix to this testimony. The report was thorough in its analysis of the current status of broadband services across Connecticut, and detailed certain recommendations for proceeding to enhance access to and adoption of broadband by residents, communities, and businesses.

There is a bill pending in the Commerce Committee, R.B. 225 *An Act Authorizing An Updated Advanced Communications Technology Study*, which would authorize CASE

- to help the state develop a strategic plan for specifically increasing the economic impact of investment in advanced technologies by state and private entities,
- to develop methods to create links between all the relevant entities, and
- to ensure strong coordination and communication between them to continue efforts to sustain broadband policy, strategy, and promotion to enhance economic development and leadership opportunities for Connecticut.

It is well accepted that by improving communication and the flow of information and social interaction, broadband facilitates to expand business opportunities nationally and globally, increases job creation, reduces miles driven and fossil fuels consumed, expands consumer choice, and improves competition for goods and services. Additionally, it is important to target educational attainment in advanced technologies in order for Connecticut to stay ahead of the competition by creating a work force capable of maintaining the high tech industries necessary for the state to succeed in the national and global economies.

This proposed legislation creating the Commission for Technology Advancement is quite timely. It is unfortunately apparent from the research developed in the CASE Guidelines that Connecticut currently has inadequate coordination among broadband policy makers and does not have clearly defined broadband goals. In researching other states and nations, one common thread found in the CASE Guidelines that was evident among broadband leaders in other states and countries was a need for a clearly defined goal and actionable steps to advance economic development and job creation. This is especially true in attempting to develop the significant public policy goals that will increase economic development or job creation, particularly at times like these when the economy has suffered for a number of years and requires great stimulation before investment and confidence can once again grow and achieve positive results.

The OCC would suggest that a CASE report as envisioned by R.B. 225 could interact with and support the efforts of the Commission for Technology Advancement which is intended to be the principal technology advancement policy advisor for state government, and which will develop, oversee and direct the attainment of state-wide technology advancement goals. This would enhance the coordination between the legislative and executive branches while positioning CASE to provide the General Assembly with a comprehensive report as required in the R.B. 225 statute. This will allow the General Assembly a far greater opportunity to fully evaluate the progress being made in advancing the use of broadband services in this state for the benefit of the economy and job creation.

Connecticut must be proactive in this area since other states and countries are also installing fiber-optic technology for widespread residential and business use. Connecticut's existing broadband system is meeting today's needs, but are we ready for tomorrow?

This proposed bill will jumpstart the rapid development of well-researched and vetted guidelines developed by CASE to spur the benefits of investment in advanced technologies by the state and private entities. Only through this processes can the methods be developed to ensure strong coordination and communication to continue efforts to sustain broadband policy, strategy, and promotion to enhance economic development and leadership opportunities for Connecticut.

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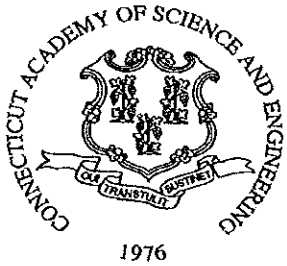
Guidelines for the Development of a Strategic Plan for Accessibility to and Adoption of Broadband Services in Connecticut

December 2011

A Report By

The Connecticut Academy of Science and Engineering



For the

Connecticut Office of Consumer Counsel

and

Connecticut Public Utilities Regulatory Authority, Department of Energy and Environmental Protection

The full report, executive summary, and key points are available at

www.ctcase.org (scroll down to **Reports and Studies**).