

TESTIMONY HB 6402
Reverend Dr. Boise Kimber

Hello. My name is Reverend Dr. Boise Kimber and I am the President of the CT Chapter of the Ministerial Alliance Against the Digital Divide or otherwise known as MAADD.

MAADD is a 220,000+ member next- generation civil rights organization led by ministers devoted to bridging the Digital Divide and promoting economic and individual empowerment in low income and minority communities across the country. We believe that access to technology is the key to solving the major problems that our country and our communities are faced with – problems dealing with such things as unemployment, healthcare and education.

MAADD has just opened up a new state chapter in Connecticut and we are currently busy working to build a grassroots network of people across the state who believe that infusing Connecticut with state-of-the-art broadband technology can provide endless opportunities for minority communities to prosper.

MAADD knows that wireless broadband is the key to bridging the Digital Divide. But for this dream to become a reality, we need the Connecticut General Assembly to act! Therefore, we are here today to call upon Connecticut lawmakers to swiftly pass House Bill 6402 into law.

This legislation is crucial for people living in low income and minority communities as it will infuse Connecticut with jobs and millions of dollars in state-of-the-art broadband investment. For people struggling to get by in today's economy this is life changing. With increased broadband investment, Connecticut can create unlimited potential for communities besieged with high unemployment, soaring healthcare costs and a lack of access to a quality education. With the latest broadband technology, underserved neighborhoods can promote economic development through the establishment of minority owned businesses that hire locally, and our communities can have better access to healthcare, education and jobs.

Unfortunately, the telecom statute in Connecticut needs to be updated to address the realities of today. Today, low income and minority communities are increasingly becoming more reliant on wireless technology as people are rapidly dropping landline phone service in favor of using wireless only phone service to communicate. Based on national data on wireless substitution that shows how quickly the market is migrating to wireless only phone service, MAADD believes that landline technology will become outdated technology within the next decade. In fact, with the advent of 4G wireless technologies, we believe that even DSL and cable modems will start

to become obsolete within the next 10 years. Therefore, Connecticut must not lose out on the future because it is focused on creating policies that cater to the technology of the past.

We understand that there are opponents to this legislation that believe that HB 6402 may allow phone companies to raise rates on landline phone service. But the reality is that this legislation does nothing to negatively impact existing landline phone service. Plus, with the plethora of options available today, even the most vulnerable consumers are not held hostage to landline phones anymore. And seniors are no exception. We see in our church communities that almost all of our seniors are embracing wireless technology. They are coming to church and reading the Bible on their iPads. And pastors in churches across the nation now have to make an announcement before church service that we never had to make 10 years ago – “Please turn off your cell phones”. Grandparents are now using smartphones to text with their grandchildren and those that are raising their grandkids are learning computer skills to be able to help them with their homework. We have found in our churches that seniors will embrace technology when they know that cheaper products and services are available. And when they are educated on the availability of these more affordable technologies they WANT to learn how to use them.

We know that access to technology is already a requirement to get an education, access social services and find a job. But soon broadband technology will be ingrained in every aspect of our daily lives - and some of the most exciting advancements are in healthcare. With Telehealth, you can now attach a device to your iPhone and do a real time EKG, obtain an ultrasound of your heart and other organs, monitor your glucose and track your vital signs. Wireless pacemakers can now send data automatically to their physician and inform them immediately if something goes wrong. Seniors have technology available that can monitor them at home and enable them to live independently without having to enter into a nursing home. The opportunities are endless and with these advancements it is more important than ever that our communities are not left out of the Digital Revolution.

So, to hold up this important legislation and the tremendous benefits that it brings in the form of jobs and investment because of concerns over technology that is rapidly becoming obsolete would be like lawmakers in the early 1900's holding up the future of the automobile because they were concerned about developing policies that cater to the buggy whip.

Connecticut's minority communities are in desperate need of the jobs and investment that this legislation has to offer. With so many Connecticut citizens struggling today, this legislation could be a real turning point that provides the opportunity necessary for people to better their lives. So for the sake of our future and the future of our children, it is critical that lawmakers pass HB 6402 into law. Thank you for your time.