

CCM 2013 Testimony

900 CHAPEL STREET, 9th FLOOR, NEW HAVEN, CT 06510-2807 PHONE (203) 498-3000 FAX (203) 562-6314

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PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

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The Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM) is Connecticut's statewide association of towns and cities and the voice of local government - your partners in governing Connecticut. Our members represent over 92% of Connecticut's population.

SB 847 "An Act Concerning the Commission for Technology Advancement"

CCM supports SB 847 as it would address local officials' concerns and (1) reorganize the governing structure of the Nutmeg Network to establish the Commission for Technology Advancement and (2) assign municipal representation (CCM, among others) as members of the commission.

This proposal would also clarify the objectives of the commission as, among other things, "increasing and improving the usage of high-speed, cost effective network technology to meet collaboration demands of state and local government..."-- and would include "municipal facilities" among the intended institutions for connection to the network, at "reasonable rates." To this end, CCM *respectfully requests that the Committee amend SB 847* to:

- (1) **Define a transparent rate-setting process, in conformance with the Uniform Administrative Procedure Act (UAPA)**, in order to uphold that such a critical process does not continue to be an internal administrative function within the State Department of Administrative Services (DAS); and
- (2) **Ensure equitable connectivity rates for access to the network by municipal governments** that are the same as those for various other "connected" public entities. Connectivity for K-12 public schools and libraries is done at no cost. *Town and city general governments should at a minimum get the same treatment, and given priority to connect to the network over private entities.* While we understand this is an open access system, it was created with government financing, and intended to provide local governments with greater inter-connectivity options. Any discounts for operations and maintenance of the fiber network should be given to *all* types of government entities. Essentially, do not treat towns and cities as the private sector.

Background

Connecticut was awarded a \$94 million federal grant -- Broadband Technology Opportunity Program (BTOP) -- as part of The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. BTOP intends to significantly upgrade and expand the state's existing broadband communication infrastructure, with particular attention to improve public safety and education services throughout Connecticut. BTOP was awarded to Connecticut and required a 20% matching fund, which was satisfied through \$23 million from the E-911 surcharge.

There are three primary portals of the BTOP:

1. Public Safety – Public Safety Data Network (PSDN)
2. Education – Connecticut Education Network (CEN)
3. Open Access – Nutmeg Network

Throughout the development of BTOP, local officials implored system administrators that these systems should not be treated in their own individual silos, but rather they need to be accessible across municipal boundaries and among all local departments. **Communication of data systems between multiple departments is essential in delivering critical services during emergency situations.** This major initiative will not be effective in its intended use for local government efficiencies and disaster response without connections to other areas of local government. Recent events have proven that local Emergency Operation Centers (EOCs) are not typically housed at police or fire stations -- government assets from other areas (public works, health, building, water/sewer officials, etc.) are necessary for disaster response and are not connected to public safety through the BTOP fiber network.

An efficient broadband network – which the Nutmeg Network could provide - would not only allow local officials to communicate with others across an affected region during disasters, but also assist in (a) providing shared back-office services, (b) ensure that vital data is properly maintained, and (c) thereby establish “virtual regionalism”. Statewide land-use records, registrar of voting, or payroll systems and software are all realistic goals. Multiple towns, regardless of region, could share and secure essential data and realize savings because of such a network. Simply put -- the interoperable capabilities of the Nutmeg Network could have a similarly significant impact on communities as the telephone once did in the early 20th century.

Local CEOs have diligently cooperated with state officials for years on this matter – and have made clear their desires to effect change and realize efficiencies by joining the “open access” portion.

SB 847 is a positive step toward advancing the capabilities of the Nutmeg Network.

CCM urges the Committee to amend SB 847 as recommended above and to favorably report the bill.

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If you have any questions, please contact Ron Thomas (rthomas@ccm-ct.org), Bob Labanara (rlabanara@ccm-ct.org) or Mike Muszynski (mmuszynski@ccm-ct.org) or via phone (203) 498-3000.