

## **TESTIMONY ON PROPOSED BILL NO. 572 (LCO NO. 2244)**

CHAIRMAN DOYLE AND CHAIRMAN REED AND MEMBERS OF THE ENERGY AND TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE, THANK YOU FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO ADDRESS PROPOSED BILL 572, "AN ACT CONCERNING GIGABIT INTERNET ACCESS." AS PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL OF SMALL TOWNS, A MEMBER OF THE CONNECTICUT EDUCATION TECHNOLOGY COUNCIL, AND THE CONNECTICUT CONFERENCE OF MUNICIPALITIES, I CAN TELL YOU THAT A PROPOSAL FOR GIGABIT INTERNET IS A TOPIC OF DISCUSSION AND WE APPRECIATE THE OPPORTUNITY TO ENVISION A NEW FUTURE FOR OUR TOWNS AND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS.

AS A STATE WE SHOULD BE PROUD THAT BY UTILIZING A BTOP GRANT WE WERE ABLE TO TRANSFORM THE CEN NETWORK INTO THE NUTMEG NETWORK AND CREATE A FIBER NETWORK WHICH REACHES MOST HIGH SCHOOLS AND LIBRARIES, AND A GROWING NUMBER OF TOWN HALLS. THIS NETWORK WAS BUILT FOR SPEED. AS A CONDITION OF THE BTOP GRANT, PRIVATE USE ALSO MUST BE ALLOWED TO RUN ON THIS NETWORK AND THAT IS ALREADY HAPPENING. WE HAVE BUILT THE INTERNET SUPER-HIGHWAY BUT WE MUST NOW TAKE ACTION TO USE IT AND EXPAND IT. WE ARE AHEAD OF MANY STATES AND NEED TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THIS EDGE BY CONTINUING THE PROGRESS TO ADVANCE OUR ECONOMIC PROSPERITY, GOVERNMENTAL EFFICIENCIES AND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES.

TO PROCEED WE BELIEVE THAT WE NEED TO BUILD ON THE FRAMEWORK BY TAKING THE FOLLOWING STEPS:

1. CREATE AN ACTION PLAN IN COORDINATION WITH THE CONNECTICUT BROADBAND OFFICE FOR PRIVATE/PUBLIC PARTNERSHIP TO BUILD THE ON-OFF RAMPS FOR THE INTERNET SUPER-HIGHWAY... THE SO-CALLED "LAST-MILE" CONNECTIONS.
2. CONSIDER 'GIGABIT ZONES" BY LOOKING AT CONNECTIONS TO ENTERPRISE ZONES AND CLUSTERS OF PRIORITY USERS AT TECH AREAS SUCH AS COLLEGES AND RESEARCH PARKS.
3. COORDINATE STATE AGENCIES' EFFORTS BY:
  - a. AUTHORIZING THE HIRING OF THE VACANT POSITION OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE COUNCIL ON EDUCATION TECHNOLOGY.

- b. PROVIDING ADDITIONAL CAPITAL FUNDS TO CEN TO BUILD OUT FIBER CONNECTIONS TO LIBRARIES AND ADDITIONAL SCHOOLS WITH A GOAL OF ELIMINATING DSL USE WITHIN A YEAR.
  - c. EMPOWERING COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS TO WORK REGIONALLY:
    - i. ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS TO PROMOTE PRIVATE/PUBLIC PARTNERSHIPS MAYBE THROUGH EDA GRANTS
    - ii. CONTINUING LOCAL GOVERNMENT PROJECTS TO IMPROVE EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCIES BY FUNDING MORE DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS.
4. CREATE A “LAST MILE” LOCAL GRANT POOL THROUGH THE DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT FOR SMALL BUSINESSES TO GET GIGABIT SPEED CONNECTIONS AND PROVIDE MARKETING ASSISTANCE FOR START-UPS.
5. PROVIDE FUNDING FOR CEN TO PLAN AND ADDRESS THE DIGITAL DIVIDE ISSUE BY DEVELOPING STRATEGIES FOR FREE OR REDUCED INTERNET PRICING FOR STUDENTS ON THE FREE OR REDUCED LUNCH PROGRAM. AS SCHOOLS DEMAND INTERNET ACCESS FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES AT HOME WE NEED TO BRIDGE THIS BROADENING DIVIDE BY PROVIDING HOT ZONES, WIRELESS DEVICES OR TOWN’S WIRELESS MESH OR WI-MAX. THE STATE CAN RECONSIDER THE STATE OPTION OF ADOPTING A UNIVERSAL SERVICE CHARGE TO FUND THESE INITIATIVES.
6. FINALLY, THE STATE ALSO NEEDS TO ADDRESS THE LONG-TERM MAINTENANCE OF BOTH THE CURRENT AND FUTURE NETWORKS BY ADEQUATELY FUNDING STAFFING AND INFRASTRUCTURE ON AN ONGOING BASIS. I RECOMMEND A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR TECHNOLOGY FOR THE STATE.

TOWNS ARE WILLING PARTNERS TO IMPLEMENT THIS NEW VISION FOR THE STATE. WE KNOW IT IS A MULTI-YEAR TASK BUT WE HAVE A HEAD START. THE INTERNET LESSENS THE “LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION” SYNDROME AND CHANGES IT TO “CONNECTIONS, CONNECTIONS, CONNECTIONS.” THIS IS A STATEWIDE INITIATIVE WHICH CAN ASSIST URBAN AND SMALL TOWNS, LARGE AND SMALL BUSINESSES AND STUDENTS FROM MORE AFFLUENT AND LESS AFFLUENT COMMUNITIES TO BUILD OUR WORKFORCE OF THE FUTURE.

*John Elsesser: Testimony on P.B. 572*

AS THEY SAY, "IT IS A GOOD GIG IF YOU CAN GET IT."

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND THOUGHTFULNESS IN RAISING THIS TOPIC.