

Testimony by

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Secretary, Capitol Region Council of Governments**

**Before the Planning and Development Committee
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SUPPORT SB 331: AN ACT ESTABLISHING A HIGH-SPEED INTERNET SERVICE PILOT PROGRAM

Chairs Senator Osten and Representative Miller and members of the Planning and Development Committee, my name is Lisa Pellegrini and I serve as First Selectman of Somers and Secretary of the Capitol Region Council of Governments. I have with me today Jim Hayden, the First Selectman in East Granby, also a town in the CRCOG region. We come before you today in support of **SB 331: An Act Establishing a High-Speed Internet Service Pilot Program**.

For more than 45 years, the Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG) has served Hartford and surrounding municipalities -- now 37 towns with almost 1 million residents -- and helped them gain significant efficiencies in the spending of taxpayer dollars through a wide variety of cooperative purchasing and other regional service sharing initiatives.

Let me provide testimony in two areas: benefits of the bill as written and responses to possible concerns relating to the bill.

Benefits of the Bill

- The Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG) believes a competitive process to access state funds for this purpose makes sense. A matching fund will allow municipalities to take some of the financial risk out of building high speed connections in their town, if they so desire.
- CRCOG is a proponent of the use of technology and believes any effort to increase the capacity of Connecticut municipalities to serve its citizens is a worthwhile goal. CRCOG supports the pilot program concept as it has been a proven approach with technology initiatives we have undertaken for municipalities. It allows towns to work out any issues and provide a "proof of concept" before the activity becomes more widespread.

Possible Concerns with SB-331

- Concern: There is some confusion as to the process that the funds would be administered. We would suggest making this a traditional grant competition with a match requirement versus an RFP that municipalities must respond to with private partners.

- Concern: We do not want to turn our attention away from the significant progress that municipalities have made in the state with the already existing public broadband fiber Nutmeg Network, the Nutmeg Cloud Server and software as a service offerings.

The state is in the final phase of a two year plan to connect all participating municipalities to the CEN/Nutmeg Network with state grant funding, in addition to schools, libraries and public safety facilities already on the network. The millions of dollars of investment to connect 97 Connecticut municipalities reflects the state's acknowledgment of the value of a publicly run broadband fiber backbone for the purposes of communication, efficient local service delivery, and operational cost savings.

With the support of the Speaker of the House, CRCOG has been working with the Connecticut Center for Advanced Technology, Inc. (CCAT), the CT Council of Small Towns and the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities to launch programs that assist local governments in leveraging the CEN/ Nutmeg Network technology in their operations. There are five state funded demonstration projects developed in the 2014 Municipal Opportunities for Regional Efficiency (MORE) Commission's Regions group nearing completion and underway that will allow towns to benefit from back office functions to achieve cost savings and improve the efficiency of local government operations and service delivery. These demonstration projects depend on the CEN/Nutmeg Network and include Hosting Services (local government data storage and back-up/disaster recovery), Voice over Internet Protocol telephones, streaming video, electronic document management, and human resources functions. In addition, plans are being made to develop even more back office services such as GIS mapping and payroll and accounting services.

To support the piloting of these services, CRCOG and CCAT also received over \$500,000 in state funding to build a CRCOG Data Center that sits directly on the Nutmeg Network to house the software and data associated with these five projects. Even at half the cost of comparable commercial cloud hosting, the business model of the data center moving forward allows for complete self-sufficiency (including expansion and upgrades) of the CRCOG Data Center. We must not allow this investment to be overlooked as we work to create even greater connectivity through this pilot program.

CRCOG greatly appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony on this proposed bill and looks forward to providing any additional assistance the Committee may request.