

**The Planning and Development Committee**

**Public Hearing, March 11, 2016**

**Raised S.B. No. 331**

**An Act Establishing A High-Speed Internet Service Pilot Program**

**Testimony of Daryl Jones - City Controller, City of New Haven**

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. Mayor Harp of the City of New Haven fully supports Raised S.B. No. 331, *An Act Establishing A High-Speed Internet Service Pilot Program* and our administration very much looks forward to developing a successful proposal for the seed money to be authorized by the state to support public private partnership fiber network projects by cooperating municipalities and private groups.

New Haven has been an active participant in the CT Gig program from its inception, including providing procurement support for the successful September 2014 Request for Qualifications (RFQ) which was the kickoff for a series of conferences and other large scale meetings led by the Office of Consumer Counsel and the State Broadband Office to investigate and vet potential private financial investment banks and internet service providers for a the CT Gig Project. Together with the other original two municipalities in the CTgig Project, Stamford and West Hartford, we were soon joined in the RFQ process by another 43 municipalities that raised their hands to display their support and interest in entering into public-private partnerships (P3) models to develop ultra-high-speed gigabit or "Gig" fiber networks connecting all premises in the state of Connecticut. We are proud of the fact that today over 100 municipalities have expressed interest in exploring such public-private partnership options.

Mayor Harp and the leadership of New Haven firmly believe that internet access is a fundamental right, like access to all utilities, such as electricity or water. For instance, if only 65% of New Haven's citizens had access to electricity, the state would not turn away from supporting all steps necessary to change that percentage to 100. Similarly, if only 50% of small businesses have access to reasonably priced high speed internet access, the state would be compelled to intervene and support all useful measures to support economic develop for the state and municipalities. We therefore support SB-331 as an excellent first step toward developing a competitive challenge to all 169 towns of this state to become creative and aggressive in partnering with private sector investors and internet service providers to make advanced services available to all our citizens.

We recognize that there are many other states far ahead in supporting the internet connection issues than Connecticut, states that have long had state agencies and staffs focused on developing programs, along with state financial backing for public private partnership organizations to move

their areas into the 21<sup>st</sup> century of telecommunications. Our region competes with other areas of Connecticut, and because of the reach of our high tech industries, our businesses, small and large, compete with other states and indeed around the globe. With New Haven's leadership, we believe we can successfully marshal the efforts of our region to create the high quality and detailed proposal that will combine municipal demand with private sector funding and expertise required qualify for this initial state grant funding.

New Haven is the heart of the south central Connecticut city cluster and Mayor Harp's administration has strived over the last few years to knit together the many high tech communities in our region and encouraging interlocal agreements, particularly with regard to objectively examining the various ways our communities can join public and private assets to solve this internet connectivity problem. We see on a daily basis the frustration experienced by our small businesses as their goals are thwarted by inadequate access to internet connection speeds at reasonable prices.

New Haven has already embarked on a number of high speed internet access projects, many involving private partners such as Yale University and many of the high tech institutions and manufacturers in creating advanced services and goods in our city, a city with a centuries-old history of leading the state and the Nation for technical thinking and action. We thus believe that New Haven stands ready to develop a successful municipal/private sector pilot program proposal for the seed money from the state to jump start a fiber network project focused on delivering cheaper, faster broadband services to all premises in New Haven. By reaching all addresses, the digital divide that is rapidly affecting some of our most vulnerable populations will be eliminated since digital equity will replace the divide as all our citizens (residential, small business, and community anchor institutions) will have equal access to the internet.

Our administrative team has the staffing and experience to work with our regional and private entity partners to develop a detailed business plan to leverage the state's limited public investment by an exponentially-greater investment from the private sector to develop fiber infrastructure projects in these targeted Connecticut markets. We have already engaged in discussions with multiple incumbent internet service providers already operating in the region and of course encourage them to participate in this program envisioned by SB-331.

New Haven recognizes that neither it nor its other municipal partners wishes to provide internet access services to customers, but we intend to own the fiber network itself and have control over what private entities are engaged by us to perform all the logistical services necessary to meet our public policy goals for high speed and reasonably priced internet access for all our citizens. The private sector has the resources and experience to run a fiber network as a going concern and hopefully will produce the level of service quality that New Haven and the other towns in our region will demand.