

June 23, 2005

Dear Senator:

The undersigned trade associations, public interest organizations, local government organizations, Tribal governments, and private companies share a common commitment to enhancing the availability of broadband services throughout the country. As you may know, President Bush has established a priority for universal affordable access to broadband technology by 2007. We believe that community broadband networks provide an essential catalyst for market competition, economic development, and universal, affordable Internet access for all Americans. We thus support legislation that will ensure that local governments are not inhibited from providing broadband networks to their residents and businesses.

In just the past few years, the United States has fallen to 16th among industrialized nations in deploying broadband services. In many areas of the United States, small businesses have difficulty obtaining reasonably priced broadband services. Many countries outpacing us, including Canada, Japan, and South Korea, have successfully combined municipal systems with privately deployed networks to wire their countries. Despite this situation, a handful of incumbent providers have been attempting to stop further local government deployment of community broadband services.

A century ago, incumbent suppliers of electricity sought to prevent the public sector from offering electricity for many of the same reasons incumbent broadband providers argue against community broadband deployment and services. As today, incumbents back then sought to limit competition by arguing that local governments didn't have the expertise to offer something so complex as electricity. They argued that their own businesses would suffer if they faced competition from cities and towns. Local community leaders recognized that their economic survival depended on wiring their communities. They understood that it would take both private investment and public investment to bring electricity to all Americans. Just as municipal electric systems proved critical to making access to electric service universal in the 20th Century, municipal networks can make broadband access universal in the 21st Century—as long as they have the freedom to do so.

In addition to promoting economic development, community broadband offers opportunities for enhanced educational opportunities. Without universal access to broadband, our nation's children will continue to fall behind in the technological literacy so essential to our future. Empowering local government and tribal governments will also benefit rural and urban areas and will speed deployment throughout the country, lessening the gap between the United States and other nations.

Community broadband is not incompatible with private sector competition. Municipalities across the nation already promote broadband networks in a number of different ways, while others are considering their own approach. Some may wish to complement wireline and cable networks while others may want to serve as anchor tenants for new private networks. The choice should continue to be made by local leaders who are directly accountable to their communities, using open and competitively-neutral processes, and should not be foreclosed by state or federal law.

Because of the benefits it will bring to citizens and the technology sector, Congress should ensure that municipal entities and Tribal governments may continue to offer a wide variety of broadband services. We look forward to working with you to bring broadband services to all Americans.

Sincerely,

American Association of Law Libraries
American Electronics Association (AeA)
American Library Association
American Public Power Association
Association of Research Libraries
Association for Communications Technology Professionals in Higher Education
Champaign Urbana Wireless Network
EDUCAUSE
Eyapaha Institute
Fiber to the Home Council
Free Press
Information Technology Association of America
Internet2
Intertribal Entertainment
League of California Cities
MIGIZI Communications
The Media Access Project
National American Indian Development Corporation
National Association of Telecommunications Officers and Advisors
National Association of Counties
National League of Cities
Native American Public Telecommunications
Native Airspace
Native Laboratories
Native Media and Technology Network
Native Networking Policy Center
One Economy
Power Line Communications Association
Public Knowledge
Public Technology Institute
Red Crow Creations
Rural Broadband Coalition
Soar Records
Southern California Indian Center
TeleCommUnity
Tropos Networks
United Power Line Council
U.S. Conference of Mayors
United Telecom Council
Utah Telecommunication Open Infrastructure Agency (UTOPIA)