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February 23, 2021

Chair Ruggiero and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Rhode Island Library Association (RILA) I am submitting this written testimony in support of H 5054 - An Act Relating To Public Utilities And Carriers -- Internet Service Providers -- Net Neutrality.

This bill provides for Internet service neutrality, or "net neutrality," which ensures that the Internet is not controlled by special interests who could impede access to knowledge, public discourse or commerce and widen the digital divide. RILA believes that the Internet is a public good. As more information and knowledge are not only shared online but also born online and as many government and consumer services are exclusively delivered online, access to the Internet is essential to participate in our democracy.

Without net neutrality, we will be unable to close the gap between those who have and those who lack adequate access to the Internet. Internet service providers can prioritize and de-prioritize content and services, creating a "pay to play" economy where only the wealthy can fully participate. Rhode Island libraries contribute to a safety net for those who are most negatively impacted by the digital divide. A lack of net neutrality could relegate libraries to a "slow lane" where digital content and services provided via libraries is degraded.

Without net neutrality, Internet service providers could prioritize and de-prioritize content and services based on political, religious or other beliefs, suppressing the free and open exchange of knowledge and contributing to the political divide that is having such a destructive effort on society today.

The internet is essential for people to have a voice in the political process and to access the viewpoints of others. Publicly supported institutions, such as libraries, universities, and K-12 schools, provide their community members with equal access to the Internet. Limiting access means users' right to participate in democracy is diminished, and the foundation of our nation's democracy is undermined.

Without net neutrality, a "pay to play" environment emerges, allowing a few large, wealthy companies to sustain a monopoly on the digital marketplace, making it difficult for small businesses to connect with consumers, reducing competition in the marketplace, and therefore negatively impacting innovation. Libraries are large consumers of digital content and services for

their communities. A lack of competition in the marketplace and “digital exclusives” are already causing massive and unsustainable cost increases. A lack of net neutrality inflames this trend, further reducing competition and innovation and increasing costs that will directly impact consumers.

In closing, RILA fully supports this legislation and urges passage from this committee for consideration by the House of Representatives.

Sincerely,

EDUARDO GARCIA

Edward Garcia
Library Director, Cranston Public Library
Rhode Island Library Association Legislative Action Chair