



TOWN OF WARREN, RHODE ISLAND
Office of Planning & Community Development

514 Main Street, Warren, Rhode Island 02885-4369
(401) 289-0529 brulli@townofwarren-ri.gov

MEMORANDUM

To: Members-Rhode Island State Legislature
From: Bob Rulli, Director
Re: House Bill No. 5148
Date: February 23, 2021

On behalf of the Town of Warren please accept this Memorandum in support of House Bill No. 5148. The last year has amplified more than ever the need for the State to improve access to high-speed broadband. Challenges associated with distance learning, tele-medicine, remote work, and on-line meetings has created a significant strain on the existing internet infrastructure for residents and businesses located in the East Bay and on Aquidneck Island.

The fact that Rhode Island has in place an existing 400-mile, 48 strand fiber optic network that cannot be accessed economically by a majority of local governments, residents and businesses is unacceptable. While I believe the creation of the OSHEAN 2.0 network was well intentioned, the combination of the cost to access and the limited ability to access puts the state at a significant disadvantage. As I am sure you are aware, a combination of federal funds (Broadband Technology Opportunities Program-\$21.7M) and state funds (\$10.3M) facilitated this system to be built out, however, access is limited to non-profits, government entities and education institutions. While local governments have access, the cost is prohibitive. In Warren, there is existing fiber on the pole directly in front of Town Hall, yet the cost to bring that fiber 15 feet into the building is more than \$22,000. In the existing economic climate resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, this is not a cost that Town can afford. The fact that Rhode Island has more fiber optic coverage per capita than any other state in the Country with only 12% of the available infrastructure being utilized is unfortunate.

I encourage you to enact the proposed legislation and give Rhode Island residents and businesses the economic advantage that much of the world recognizes to be an economic driver. As we adjust to the new normal let us leverage every existing resource that we have available to us.