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February 22, 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 **H5148 - An Act Relating To State Affairs And Government -- The Rhode Island Broadband Development Program.**

Rhode Island libraries (especially public libraries) provide free broadband access across our state to all Rhode Islanders, especially those that do not have access at home. Libraries were very involved in the original BroadbandRI effort from close to a decade ago. Representatives from the Cranston Public Library and Providence Public Library helped create a digital literacy curriculum as part of that program. Libraries across the state continue to provide not only broadband access, but digital literacy instruction, technology help, and lending of devices including mobile internet hotspots.

Access to broadband internet for education, information, and civic engagement is a necessity to participate fully in our interconnected world. We have seen during the recent pandemic how important universal access to broadband is for students for virtual learning, for parents who needed to be able to work from home, and for those who needed access to apply for unemployment benefits or register for a vaccine. Libraries again stepped up across the state, even during the shutdown and created parking lot Wifi networks and provided remote technical assistance to those struggling with virtual technology.

The American Library Association recently passed a resolution calling for Universal broadband as a human right.<sup>1</sup> RILA fully supports the passage of this bill and we believe the creation of a Broadband Development Program and a Rhode Island Broadband Council is essential to ensure that the state continues to plan for expanded broadband access across our state. This Council and the proposed Broadband Coordinator can access federal funds for this work to make sure no Rhode Islander is left behind in the 21st century.

Due to the lengthy involvement and engagement by libraries on broadband adoption, access and education, RILA believes strongly that representation from libraries is necessary and applauds the sponsors for including a librarian on the proposed Council. We would like to propose a small change. The current text calls for a representative from Ocean State Libraries or designee. We propose changing that to the Chief Library Officer from the Office of Library and Information Services (OLIS) or designee. OLIS would have a greater role in

coordinating efforts among libraries of all types across Rhode Island as part of the larger role of the Council.

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

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ala.org/aboutala/sites/ala.org.aboutala/files/content/Resolution%20in%20Support%20of%20Broadband%20as%20a%20Human%20Right%20FINAL.pdf>