



**WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF THE NEW ENGLAND CONNECTIVITY &  
TELECOMMUNICATIONS ASSOCIATION, INC. REGARDING HOUSE BILL No. 7333**

**February 3, 2026**

Dear Chair Solomon and distinguished Members of the House Corporations Committee,

On behalf of the New England Connectivity and Telecommunications Association (NECTA), I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to House Bill No. 7333, relating to broadband oversight and accountability.

**State of Broadband in Rhode Island**

When it comes to delivering high-speed broadband, the broadband industry is a success story in Rhode Island, helping to grow the economy while remaining affordable to consumers. Rhode Island continues to be a national leader in broadband coverage and speed. In an overall study of access and service, BroadbandNow, an independent broadband research group, ranked Rhode Island *third* in the country for near universal access to broadband speeds, with 98.7% of the population having access to 100mbps or greater; *second* in the country for 98% of households having access to 1G broadband speeds; and *fifth in the country* for excellent low-latency, fast speeds, affordability, and near-universal access to broadband services.<sup>1</sup> Rhode Island was also ranked fifth in the nation for broadband speed performance in a recent report by Ookla, an independent company that measures connectivity.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to widespread deployment, Rhode Island's broadband infrastructure is state-of-the-art. Since 2000, the cable broadband industry has invested over \$300 billion to construct world class, high speed national broadband networks. In Rhode Island, that interconnected, multistate infrastructure system is supported through over a billion dollars of direct investment, including approximately 2000 miles of fiber, delivering robust, reliable, and ultra-fast broadband throughout Rhode Island. In Rhode Island, NECTA represents Cox Communications, who has more than 600 employees in Rhode Island and who, in the past five years alone, has invested hundreds of millions of dollars in capital improvements to their network infrastructure in the state.

**HB.7333 findings are counter to established broadband policy in Rhode Island**

The constant investment and product and service innovations by Internet Service Providers (ISPs) in Rhode Island are made possible by the state's "light-touch" regulatory framework as encapsulated

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<sup>1</sup> <https://broadbandnow.com/Rhode-Island>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ookla.com/research/reports/h1-2025-50-u-s-states-broadband-report>

in Section 39-28-1 of the General Laws whereby “[The] proliferation of new technologies and applications and the growing number of providers developing and offering innovative services using internet protocol are due in large part to little barrier to investment, including freedom from state law and regulations...” This modern telecommunications policy has fostered a robust marketplace that has spurred industry competition and led to a convergence of residential and business consumer video, broadband, voice, and wireless offerings from new service providers at lower costs. That this bill proposes to strike this important finding from the statute would be a complete reversal from the broadband deployment policies previously adopted by the Legislature.

Further, several of the findings in HB.7333 are inaccurate or misleading. For example, finding (4) notes that no other state maintains a prohibition on broadband oversight as sweeping as Rhode Island’s. As incentivizing broadband deployment became more important to state economic policy, many states enacted laws over the past decade to ensure a light-touch and predictable regulatory framework allowing for capital investment in broadband deployment. Indeed, many states, including Massachusetts, have enacted similar statutory language that either expressly prohibits regulation of Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) or internet protocol (IP) enabled services or exempts certain IP services from regulation by that state’s regulatory agency. Additionally, in granting final approval for funding under the Broadband Equity Access and Deployment (BEAD) program, the federal government explicitly states that states must commit to not regulating broadband internet service, not show meaningful oversight of such services.<sup>3</sup>

Finding (7) also muddles the difference between economic development agencies and an agency with regulatory powers that this bill pushes to create. While several states such as Massachusetts, Vermont, and Maine established quasi-public agencies, those agencies were created specifically to facilitate broadband deployment to unserved areas of the state prior to enactment of the federal BEAD program. None of those agencies have been vested with regulatory authority to regulate broadband services and they perform many of the same administrative functions and mission as Rhode Island Commerce’s Connect RI. If any oversight is required, it is by the existing state broadband office to ensure that the funding received by the federal government is being allocated in accordance with federal guidelines.

#### **HB.7333 seeks to create a duplicative and costly oversight agency**

The bill’s ultimate goal to create an oversight agency for broadband would duplicate the regulatory structure of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) which already oversees data collection requirements for deployment, pricing, and related broadband data. The FCC collects, and makes publicly available, detailed current and historical broadband deployment data for both fixed and mobile services.<sup>4</sup> The FCC also requires all broadband providers to make comprehensive pricing information publicly available in machine-readable spreadsheets for anyone to collect and utilize for comparisons or other analyses.<sup>5</sup> Creating a state agency that would perform the same functions as the FCC would increase costs to ISPs, introduce another compliance layer making it harder for ISPs, especially new market entrants, to do business in the state, and is simply unnecessary.

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<sup>3</sup> [https://broadbandusa.ntia.gov/sites/default/files/2026-01/BEAD\\_FAQs\\_V17.pdf](https://broadbandusa.ntia.gov/sites/default/files/2026-01/BEAD_FAQs_V17.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., [Broadband Data Collection](#); [FCC National Broadband Map](#); [Fixed Broadband Deployment Data from FCC Form 477](#); [Mobile Deployment Form 477 Data](#).

<sup>5</sup> 47 C.F.R. § 8.1(a)(3).

Further, directing Rhode Island Commerce to develop and submit a detailed plan for forming a new “broadband oversight authority” likewise ignores evidence that broadband providers are constantly innovating to make broadband faster and more reliable. The industry is naturally incentivized to collaborate to develop standards to ensure interoperability (for example, in the widespread usage of Wi-Fi) and a robust and economically efficient market for products and services. A top-down, government-run standards-setting state regulatory approach, suggested by the planning and creation of this broadband oversight authority, would only stifle innovation.

### **HB.7333 does not address the digital divide**

By seeking to establish a duplicative regulatory system for ISPs, House Bill 7333 does not truly speak to Rhode Island’s next broadband challenge, overcoming barriers to adoption. Even with the high rate of broadband infrastructure deployment in Rhode Island, we know gaps in digital equity still exist. There is a significant difference between having *access* to broadband connectivity and the actual ability or willingness to *adopt* that service. Barriers to adoption include not just cost, but language barriers, digital literacy and a host of other complex societal challenges that prevent some households from connecting to high-speed internet service. The fastest, clearest, and most equitable path to increasing internet adoption is for Rhode Island to use its federal dollars to help families overcome the digital divide, such as employing digital navigators to help people understand how to connect and use the internet safely, not by enacting onerous and duplicative broadband oversight rules overseen by a utility-style regulatory agency.

Thank you for your time and attention to this testimony. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,



Timothy O. Wilkerson  
President

### **About NECTA**

NECTA is a five-state regional trade association representing substantially all private cable broadband providers in Rhode Island, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont. In Rhode Island, NECTA represents Cox Communications. Cox produces an estimated \$850 million annually in economic activity in the state and employs over 600 Rhode Island residents generating over \$57 million in wage and salary payments.