



**RE: H 7083**

Chairperson Ruggiero and members of the House Innovation, Internet, & Technology Committee:

On behalf of AARP- RI and our over 132,000+ members in Rhode Island we are in strong support of H 7083. This act would establish a broadband council to create a plan to increase the use of broadband service in the state.

Achieving digital equity ensures that everyone – regardless of age, ability, income, level of English proficiency, or whether they live in communities of color, low-income communities, tribal lands, or rural areas – has access to affordable high-speed internet (also known as broadband) and to the equipment and digital skills required to use the service effectively.

Digital equity is a central focus of AARP policy on high-speed internet access. Three components of digital equity are

- **Availability:** Communities need the infrastructure to be able to offer high-speed internet. Yet availability is lacking in many parts of the country, particularly many lower-income and rural areas. Further, the service must have the capacity to support current and future needs.
- **Affordability:** Availability is insufficient if the service and applicable equipment are not affordable for all people. Even when price competition is present, households with low and moderate incomes often need a subsidy to be able to afford service.
- **Digital literacy:** People who have high-speed internet service in their homes need digital literacy skills to be able to benefit from it. Moreover, approximately one-third of those who are offline have incomes above the traditional thresholds for subsidized programs. They may benefit from education about the value of connectivity and technology use.

While we are in support of H 7083, AARP Rhode Island would like to note that the membership of the proposed Broadband Council as listed does not include representatives of consumer-focused groups, including representatives of the aging and disabilities communities. In the description of the duties and powers of the council it states that the Council will work to *“build and facilitate local technology planning teams or partnerships with members representing cross-sections of the community”* and *“Provide information and advice to increase access to broadband education, awareness, training, access, equipment, and support to libraries, schools, colleges and universities, health care providers, and community support organizations”*. AARP is highly supportive of this work but found it discouraging that there was no mention of any institutions or groups that could represent the aging or disabled communities.

In the text of H 7083 It states that “Rhode Island has missed out on federal technology dollars because it is one of only two (2) states without a broadband administrator to access federal dollars.” It goes on to state that “in light of a new federal administration and renewed funding, the Rhode Island Broadband Development Program must be positioned to access federal funding, address issues of high- speed access, and leverage economic development opportunities in a 21st century economy.” AARP RI believes that for these reasons and in order to make the best use of funds flowing to the state from the American Rescue Plan Act and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, The Rhode Island Broadband Development Program Act must be passed this session. The pandemic has underscored vast disparities in broadband access, and we need to address them efficiently and effectively.

Thank you for allowing us to testify in support of this important piece of legislation, and we are willing to work with the committee to address the concerns that we have highlighted in this testimony.

Thank you again and have a wonderful evening.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Matt R Netto". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Matthew Netto  
Associate State Director - Advocacy, AARP-RI