



February 9, 2022

The Honorable Deborah Ruggiero  
House Committee on Innovation, Internet & Technology  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

RE: 7083 -The Rhode Island Broadband Development Program

Dear Chairwoman Ruggiero,

I thank you for elevating the need to focus on and support strategic planning and deployment of increased broadband infrastructure in Rhode Island through House Bill 7083, which calls for the designation of a broadband administrator and establishes an advisory broadband council. Rhode Island Commerce applauds the emphasis on expanding broadband access for Rhode Islanders and Rhode Island businesses. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted how important high-quality broadband access is and the challenges we face in terms of the inequitable access to affordable, high-speed internet in our state and nationally. Residents of all ages deserve access to the internet and the ability to unlock the tools, resources, and opportunities that come from internet access.

We'd also like to highlight the impact the issue has on businesses. As we have worked to help small businesses during the pandemic, we have encountered many examples of how significant the need is particularly for Rhode Island's businesses, and especially our small and minority-owned businesses.

We have seen businesses forego growth and hiring because of prohibitive internet costs. Taylor Box in Warren, for example, was required to pay \$17,000 to run fiber to their site, a cost many small businesses simply can't take on. On the other hand, affordable high-speed internet, where available, helps retain businesses and drive location decisions. For example, one of the reasons Inspire Environmental, which maps the ocean floor for wind farms, remained in Newport is because they were able to secure space at Innovate Newport, one of only a small number of commercial access points for high-speed fiberoptic on Aquidneck Island.

Given that provisions for a broadband coordinator, advisory council, and state broadband program are laid out in the Governor's proposed FY23 budget, we are supportive of H7083's focus on designating a broadband administrator at Commerce and on forming an advisory council. Given our involvement with this important subject to date, we at Commerce would welcome the opportunity to coordinate this work while seeking input from such an advisory council. We welcome further discussion on these specific points if helpful. We would also advocate for an opportunity to pair this proposal with the appropriation of financial resources to support this administrator role long term in order to best set up the administrator and the advisory council to engage in this work and secure federal funding. We stand ready to assist and to collaborate on advancing the shared aims of the Governor's budget and this bill.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Stefan Pryor".

Stefan Pryor  
Secretary of Commerce

Cc: Honorable Members of the House Committee on Innovation, Internet & Technology