



Public & Government Relations  
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February 9, 2022

The Honorable Deborah Ruggiero, Chair  
House Committee on Innovation, Internet, and Technology  
Room 101 – State House  
Providence, RI 02903

Re: H – 7083, An Act Relating to State Affairs and Government – The Rhode Island Broadband Development Program

Dear Chair Ruggiero,

I write today regarding the manner in which H7083 is framed and to express ongoing concern regarding the amount of misinformation circulating about broadband infrastructure in Rhode Island. Our state will soon be in receipt of an historic amount of federal dollars to invest in broadband-related initiatives. To maximize our return on this opportunity, the General Assembly must base policy decisions on facts and data to ensure that these federal dollars are appropriated in an efficient and effective manner that avoids unnecessary redundancies and long-term liabilities for the State or any of its municipalities. H7083 will not allow the State to accomplish these goals.

Over that past five years, Cox has invested over \$257 million in upgrading our infrastructure in Rhode Island. As a result, Rhode Island has much to celebrate when it comes to broadband. More than 99% of homes have access to gigabit-speed internet and the State is consistently ranked as having the highest speeds in the country.<sup>1</sup> We are committed to helping Rhode Island close the digital divide, and strongly believe the best way to accomplish that goal is by the State partnering with existing ISP's like Cox and Verizon that have the experience of building, operating, and maintaining these sophisticated and complex systems and not by the State or its municipalities building costly, redundant, and financially unsustainable systems.

Leveraging our existing infrastructure and focusing on *adoption* can allow Rhode Island to close the digital divide and ensure all Rhode Islanders, regardless of income level, can learn, work, and connect to important services.

To help accomplish this goal, our Connect2Compete program provides in-home broadband for \$9.95 per month and was established to help bridge the digital divide and ensure reliable in-home Internet was accessible to nearly everyone in Rhode Island, regardless of income level. The service is available to families with a K-12 student who:

- Are eligible for the National School Lunch Program, SNAP, TANF, Head Start, WIC and/or LIHEAP.
- Receive tenant-based vouchers, project-based vouchers, or Section 8 Project-Based Rental Assistance.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2021/04/30/metro/study-rhode-island-has-fastest-internet-speeds-country/#:~:text=The%20site%2C%20which%20has%20a,the%20annual%20HighSpeedInternet.com%20rankings.>

- Live in public housing.

Connect2Compete requires no annual contracts or deposits and includes free Wi-Fi modem and installation. Discounted equipment is available via our partnership with PCs for People.

An additional resource, the Affordable Connectivity Program (“ACP”) is a newly established federal program that replaced the Emergency Broadband Benefit program.

Eligible households enrolled in the ACP receive up to \$30 off their monthly bill based on their current internet service. There are close to 6,000 Rhode Island families currently enrolled in ACP with Cox.

As another important note, H7086 seems to duplicate efforts and resources already allocated by the General Assembly. The Governor’s supplemental budget request, which passed earlier this year, included a \$100,000 broadband director position at the Commerce Corporation. Just one month later, this bill seeks to create *another* position at the Commerce Corporation for a broadband administrator, with seemingly the same responsibilities as the already approved broadband coordinator.

Additionally, Article 9 of the Governor’s FY 2023 budget proposal includes a broadband plan. Due to the tremendous amount of financial resources that are proposed to be spent on such a venture, we believe the Finance Committee is the proper venue for vetting these plans that allocate funding and potential FTEs.

Thank you for your consideration. Please know we understand and share your passion for this subject, but we must ensure we are making fact-based policy decisions. Please feel free to contact me at [Stephanie.Federico@cox.com](mailto:Stephanie.Federico@cox.com) should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

*Stephanie L. Federico*

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Cc: Members the House Committee on Innovation, Internet, and Technology