

**BEFORE THE RHODE ISLAND HOUSE COMMITTEE ON  
INNOVATION, INTERNET, & TECHNOLOGY**

**February 9, 2022**

**Providence, Rhode Island**

Written Testimony of USTelecom – The Broadband Association  
in Opposition to HB 7187

USTelecom – The Broadband Association (“USTelecom”) and its members, America’s innovative broadband providers, are dedicated to maintaining an open internet for all consumers and businesses that rely on the world-class broadband infrastructure built by our members. While well-intentioned, we are concerned that HB 7187 may have negative impacts on consumers as well as the continued deployment of high-speed broadband networks and new innovative services powered by such infrastructure.

There is no debate about the importance of an open internet. Rather, the debate is over how such networks should be regulated, and by whom. For decades, there has been bipartisan agreement that a light touch national framework should govern the internet – not a state-by-state approach. This is true for statutory and legal reasons given the interstate nature of broadband internet access service, but also because consumers expect and deserve their online experience to be governed by the same set of rules regardless of where they connect.

The internet and the traffic delivered over broadband networks are not subject to geographic boundaries. There is no Rhode Island internet. As a result, because broadband internet access service is an interstate information service, FCC decisions, on a bipartisan basis, have consistently preempted state attempts to impose separate conflicting state net neutrality regulations.

Given that consumers are increasingly demanding higher speeds, streaming more video, and using more data, there is continual need for further investment in higher capacity connections by existing providers and new entrants. Rather than focus on unnecessary state-level internet regulation, Rhode Island should focus its efforts on encouraging investment in building, improving, and maintaining new connections throughout the state, and continuously upgrading the networks that exist to carry more and more traffic.

Moreover, efforts are needed to ensure that all low-income Rhode Island residents are aware of opportunities available to them to help pay for access to broadband networks, such as the FCC’s recently established Affordable Connectivity Program, or to promote digital literacy. The state can play an important role in the broadband future of its residents, but for the legal and policy

reasons discussed above, enacting a law that conflicts with the national framework governing the broadband industry will have negative effects on consumers, innovation and investment.

USTelecom firmly supports a federal framework that prohibits blocking, throttling or unreasonable discrimination. As a matter of policy and law, such action must be taken by Congress—not the Rhode Island legislature or 49 other state legislatures. A permanent federal legislative framework will provide consumers with protections as they use the internet and broadband providers with the clarity they need to continue investing and innovating.

In the meantime, all major Internet Service Providers (ISPs) have publicly committed to open internet principles. Rather than advancing conflicting state legislation, our collective efforts should be focused on working together to adopt federal legislation that will enshrine into law strong consumer protections and regulatory certainty for all.