

# Support Community Internet and Municipal Broadband

February 22, 2005

To whom it may concern:

The signatories to this letter oppose any state or federal policies that would impose a blanket ban or significant impediment to any city, county or state entity from providing broadband services to their citizens. We call on all states considering such legislation to reject it as harmful to the interests of their citizens.

The President, the Congress, and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) have all identified the availability of competitive, affordable high-speed Internet broadband access for all Americans as a national priority. The President has set an aggressive goal of 2007 for universal access in the United States. Without the contributions of local governments, it is doubtful that we will achieve universal deployment at all, let alone in two years.

Broadband access has become increasingly essential to economic growth, healthcare, and education. What electric power and telephones were to the 20th Century, broadband access will be to the 21st. Towns that don't have affordable broadband lose jobs. Their children suffer a serious disadvantage in college or in the workforce, where fluency with computers and the Internet is increasingly assumed as a matter of course. Rural towns without broadband cannot take advantage of new breakthroughs in telemedicine or the economic opportunities created by telecommuting. Even in crowded urban areas, the availability of broadband can vary from one neighborhood to another, stranding one neighborhood on the wrong side of the "digital divide" while two, three or even four broadband providers serve their neighbors.

Municipalities have a valuable role to play in filling this gap. Municipalities have a long history of providing necessary services for citizens and stimulating local businesses. In the 20th century, municipalities built power plants and telephone lines when private services did not move fast enough. Our competitive power and telecom industries today demonstrate that these services by municipalities complement private industry rather than compete with it. In addition, municipalities have a long history of spending money to benefit their citizens and encourage business development. Municipalities across the country have invested public money in convention centers, health clinics, and community colleges not to make money, but to bring business opportunities, healthcare, and education to their citizens. They should have the same opportunity to offer public hotspots and broadband access.

Opponents of municipal broadband have raised the strawman argument of governments monopolizing broadband or discriminating against competing private networks. Every signatory to this letter agrees that federal, state and local policies should encourage deployment of broadband networks in a competitive and technologically neutral manner. The reality has been that local governments only spend money to build systems when they believe a need exists, and that these local systems encourage private companies to deploy and invest in competitive systems.

In conclusion, the question of municipal broadband is one that effects us all as a nation. In the last five years, the United States has fallen from an international leader in broadband to 13th among industrialized nations. Many of the countries that are now ahead of us—Canada, Japan, Korea—have used municipal systems as one important element in their broadband strategy. As a nation, we cannot afford to cut off any successful strategy if we want to remain internationally competitive. Nor should any state stand in the way of local governments serving the needs of local citizens.

Sincerely,

## National Organizations

Alliance for Community Media  
Association for Community Networking  
Center for Creative Voices in Media  
Center for Digital Democracy  
Common Cause  
Consumer Action  
Consumer Federation of America  
Consumers for Auto Reliability and Safety  
Consumers Union  
EDUCAUSE  
Free Press  
Media Access Project  
Media Channel  
New America Foundation  
Office of Communication of  
United Church of Christ  
Prometheus Radio Project  
US PIRG

## Community Networking Projects

Austin Wireless City Project  
Champaign-Urbana Community Wireless  
Network (CUWiN)  
Center for Neighborhood Technology  
Detroit Wireless Project  
Newbury Open.Net  
NYC Wireless

## Prominent Regional, State and Local Groups

Akaku: Maui Community TV  
Alaska PIRG  
Amburgey & Associates, P.C.  
Arizona PIRG  
Baller Herbst Law Group  
Borough of Kutztown

California PIRG  
Cape Cod Community Media Center  
CCTV Center for Media & Democracy  
Chicago Access Network Television  
Chicago Consumer Coalition  
Chicago Media Action  
City of Fairborn - GATV10  
City of Geneva, Illinois  
Community Access Partners of San  
Buenaventura  
EFF-Austin  
F2C: Freedom to Connect  
Fiber For Our Future  
Florida Municipal Electric Association  
Florida PIRG  
Georgia PIRG  
Get Illinois Online  
Illinois Community Technology  
Consortium  
Illinois Municipal Utilities Association  
Iowa Association of Municipal Utilities  
Lafayette Pro Fiber  
Lowell Telecommunications Corporation  
Malden Access TV  
Mass PIRG  
Massachusetts Consumers' Coalition  
Media Alliance  
Mountain Area Information Network  
North Carolina Consumers Council, Inc.  
PA-Fiber  
Penn PIRG  
PIRG in Michigan  
Public Access Corporation of DC  
Public News Service  
Reclaim the Media  
SCAN Community Media  
The Peoples Channel 8  
Vermont PIRG  
Virginia Citizens Consumer Council  
WCCA TV 13 "The People's Channel"