



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND
EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF COMMERCE

Submitted via email

March 13, 2025

The Honorable Joseph J. Solomon, Jr.
Chair, House Committee on Corporations
State House
82 Smith St.
Providence, RI 02903

RE: H. 5817 — Broadband Deployment and Investment Act

Dear Chair Solomon and Members of the Committee,

I write to offer comments on House Bill 5817, the Broadband Deployment and Investment Act. This bill would require the Rhode Island Commerce Corporation (“Corporation”) to collect broadband mapping data and make available online a broadband map; require the Corporation to design a plan for a regulatory authority for broadband service; and enact a regulatory regime for broadband service in the state.

As the bill notes, fast, affordable, reliable broadband internet service is essential infrastructure for Rhode Islanders’ full participation in 21st century society. For that reason, the Corporation, through its ConnectRI initiative, has been 1) implementing the State’s commitment of \$25 million from the Capital Projects Fund, which will provide improved internet access for over 16,000 locations once completed; 2) planning and implementing infrastructure deployment of the \$108.7M available to Rhode Island through the Infrastructure, Investment, and Jobs Act; and 3) preparing for deployment of the \$4.5M available to Rhode Island through the Digital Equity Act. We have made remarkable progress, and we have done so with a full-time staff of three. This includes building a layered Rhode Island Broadband Map, which provides information on service types (e.g., fiber, coaxial, fixed wireless), levels available (e.g., 100/20Mbps), real speeds (i.e., speeds experienced by consumers), and federal funding that has supported individual locations, as is a charge of the Rhode Island Broadband Development Program (§ 42-163-3).

The Corporation supports efforts to increase consumer information related to broadband connectivity in the state, which is why we have built the robust level of mapping that we have. For example, the bill requires Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to report to the Corporation outage information, which the Corporation must then make available to the public. This information is already collected by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC)’s Network Outage Reporting System (NORS); having the State’s reporting requirements align with those of the FCC can streamline administrative burden for ISPs while providing required transparency.

Further, the Corporation supports efforts to establish a permanent broadband office with statutory authority; however, we believe the establishment of the regulatory authority outlined in this legislation may be premature and we would support a longer time frame for implementation. We would welcome further discussion with the sponsors.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Elizabeth M. Tanner". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Elizabeth M. Tanner, Esq.
Secretary of Commerce

CC. Honorable Members of the House Committee on Corporations
The Honorable Michelle E. McGaw
Nicole McCarty, Esq., Chief Legal Counsel