



Consumer Council and Other State Officials Attend Historic FCC Hearing on Net Neutrality

Thursday, February 26, 2015 was a historic day at the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), as the Commission voted to reclassify broadband as a “Title II” service under the Federal Communication Act. What does it mean to be a Title II service? Most importantly, that the FCC can require telecommunications providers like AT&T, Comcast, and Verizon to ensure “net neutrality” for all users – in other words, they cannot create a “fast lane” on the internet available to those companies willing to pay more to reach internet users faster. This was an important victory for consumers, as it means that all content providers and users will communicate on a level playing field – no one can pay more or charge more to gain faster speed at the expense of other users.

On hand because of a special invite from the FCC’s Special Counsel Gig Sohn were Consumer Counsel Elin Swanson Katz, State Broadband Policy Coordinator William Vallee, Senator Beth Bye, and Comptroller Kevin Lembo. They were invited because of their leadership on the CTgig Project, in which a large number of Connecticut municipalities are seeking to develop ultra-high-speed gigabit “Gig” networks in their communities through public-private partnerships. These efforts were recognized because on the same day, the FCC voted to preempt state laws that prevent or hinder towns from developing such networks. FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler discussed the success of the many communities which used public-private partnerships to create broadband networks, stating, “These efforts are reaping dividends, enabling new economic opportunities and improvements in education, health care, and public safety for the communities that take these steps.”

The Connecticut delegation was able to meet with both Chairman Wheeler and Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel, a Connecticut native, after the hearing to discuss the CTgig Project. Consumer Counsel Katz and Senator Bye also met Apple co-founder Steve Wozniak,

who was on hand for the hearing because of his support for community networks such as those sought by the CTgig Project. Wozniak, who lives in Silicon Valley in California, does not have adequate internet access at his home, and indicated it takes hours to just to download a movie. His is one of many examples heard by members of OCC on the challenges and frustrations consumers face around their broadband access.



