



## **Consumer Counsel Testifies Before Congressional Committee on Broadband Infrastructure and Closing the Digital Divide**

February 20, 2018

On January 30, 2018, Consumer Counsel Elin Swanson Katz was part of a panel of seven expert witnesses that testified before the Communications & Technology Subcommittee, a subcommittee of the U.S. House of Representatives Energy & Commerce Committee, in a hearing on “Closing the Digital Divide: Broadband Infrastructure Solutions.” The hearing focused on 25 bills designed to improve broadband infrastructure across the country and to address the “Digital Divide,” the areas of the country, both urban and rural, where citizens do not have affordable access to high-speed broadband services. Consumer Counsel Katz testified to a very engaged committee about the work of her office identifying neighborhoods in both rural and urban parts of Connecticut with difficulty accessing such services.

The members seemed particularly interested in the work done by the Office of Consumer Counsel and the State Broadband Office identifying and describing the “Homework Gap” in low-income, ethnically minority urban communities of Hartford, Connecticut. She defined the Homework Gap as the period of time between approximately 6 pm and 10 pm when students need access to the internet to complete their schoolwork. She then described learning that many students in North Hartford did not have a home broadband connection and took steps such as going fast food restaurants to use the Wi-Fi or sitting outside their homes in all kinds of weather trying to pick up Wi-Fi from another building in order to complete online school work.

Consumer Counsel Katz testified, “It is perhaps surprising to think about Connecticut as a focus of the Digital Divide, as overall, we are generally an affluent state with sound broadband infrastructure. Nonetheless, like every state, we have underserved and unserved pockets, particularly in urban and rural communities.” She then noted if it is a problem in Connecticut, it is a problem everywhere.

“What we learned about and heard from students in North Hartford is deeply troubling to me as a consumer advocate, a former teacher, a parent, and as a human being,” she stated. “No child should have to do their homework at a McDonald’s or Dunkin’ Donuts, or sit outside, in the dark, trying to finish a school project using someone else’s Wi-Fi. The implications for our

educational system and the quality of education that we deliver to children in low-income urban communities are profound. We cannot hope to lift children out of poverty, to realize their potential, and to prepare them to participate in our global economy, if we do not provide them with basic educational resources like reliable, affordable access to broadband internet services.”

She urged the lawmakers to take the following steps:

- Recognize that the Digital Divide exists in urban as well as rural communities.
- Acknowledge the role of federal, state, and local governments in ensuring affordable, reliable access to broadband internet services.
- Support Ongoing Mapping of the Availability of Broadband Internet Services
- Support self-help efforts by state and local governments
- Provide financing, grants, matching funds, and other support for build-out of broadband infrastructure

Consumer Counsel Katz’s testimony and the hearing can be viewed [here](#). More information on the hearing is also available [here](#).



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