



Senate Bill 514

An Act Establishing a Net Equality Program

Testimony of Mark Raymond

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General Law Committee

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Good morning, Senator Maroney, Representative Lemar, Senator Cicarella, Representative Rutigliano, and distinguished members of the General Law Committee. My name is Mark Raymond, and I serve as the State Chief Information Officer of the Department of Administrative Services (DAS) and Chair of the Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology. On behalf of DAS and the Commission, I have the following points to share concerning **Senate Bill 514, An Act Establishing a Net Equality Program**.

As background, the Commission leads Connecticut’s Digital Equity program, designed to increase access to the connections, devices, skills, and support that residents need to participate in our digital society. The State Digital Equity Plan and other resources are available at www.CT.gov/DigitalEquity.

That plan, which references excellent work by other agencies and partners, highlights the broadband adoption challenge in our State. High-speed Internet service is nearly ubiquitous, but only about 80 percent of locations subscribe to a wired connection — with disconnected residences highly concentrated in the poorest communities. Research that went into the Digital Equity Plan points to affordability as a key barrier to families subscribing and staying online for learning, remote work, career searching, civic meetings, telemedicine, e-commerce, and leveraging State services.

We commend the stated goals of SB 514 as a way of helping make Internet service affordable in Connecticut and recommend the following edits to further align the proposal with existing initiatives:

- **Adoption Goals:** The bill seeks to have 90 percent of eligible households subscribing to “affordable Internet” by 2026 and 95 percent by 2029. Suggested changes are clarification that eligible households would subscribe at least to the entry-level (“affordable”) service level, as some will (and already do) choose higher-tier service. We also suggest that these measures are defined. For example, the [2024 Connecticut Broadband Report](#) highlights the challenge of accurately measuring service adoption, given the bundling of the Internet with other services, the existence of multiple connections at a single location, and the need to account for different types of service delivery from fixed wireline to wireless. Finally, assessing adoption will have

to occur across multiple providers, given that progress has been made in our State to encourage competition.

- **Awareness Goals:** The bill allows providers to stop promoting affordable service once survey results indicate that at least 80 percent of qualified residents are aware of such service. If this goal remains in place, DAS believes there would be a need for an annual survey, which would have an anticipated cost that is not currently accounted for in the Governor’s budget. Regarding the inclusion of the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) language in provider advertisements, the ACP ended in June 2024. We recommend removing the ACP reference to lessen the chance of confusion among residents.
- **Cost:** We suggest defining an “affordable” price point. A definition aligned with a locally calibrated federal benchmark, such as the Consumer Price Index, helps establish a research-based standard. Separately, any provider receiving funds under the federal Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program, currently administered by the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP), must offer an affordable service option, which creates essentially the same incentive proposed in this bill.
- **Speed:** Current law ([C.G.S. § 16-330a\(3\)](#)) sets speed goals of 1 gigabit per second (Gbps) download and 100 megabits per second (Mbps) upload. The State definition of “underserved” is any speed less than 100 Mbps down and 20 Mbps up. This bill sets, as a benchmark, speeds of at least 25 Mbps down and 3 Mbps up, which is below what currently qualifies as a “served” location. These “affordable Internet” goals should be modified to meet the State’s definition of a “served” location (100 Mbps down / 20 Mbps up).
- **Annual Reporting:** Providers under the proposed legislation would report on adoption and price data annually. These efforts should align with DEEP’s existing reporting requirements in C.G.S. § 16-330c on broadband availability, affordability, and adoption in consultation with the Office of Policy and Management, the Office of State Broadband, the Commission for Educational Technology, and other State agencies.
- **State Contracts:** The bill prevents State agencies from doing business with providers that do not offer an “affordable Internet” option after October 1, 2025. We recommend that the bill address situations where a single provider in a region does not provide an affordable option. Such situations, which would preclude the State from entering into service agreements with providers, would take agencies offline in these regions and impact continuity of operations and general public service delivery.

On behalf of DAS and the Commission, I appreciate your consideration of the points raised above, and we welcome the opportunity to work with the proponents of this bill throughout the legislative session to continue to work towards the goal of making internet service affordable for all residents of the State