

## COMMUNITY BROADBAND COALITION

April 25, 2006

The Honorable Joe Barton  
Chairman  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
2125 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Dingell  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
2322 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Barton and Ranking Member Dingell:

We write to express our strong support for Title IV of the Committee Print of the Communications Opportunity, Promotion, and Enhancement Act of 2006, as favorably reported by the Telecommunications and Internet Subcommittee. We urge you to resist any efforts at full Committee to amend the language agreed to without dissent by the Subcommittee.

Community broadband networks offer the promise of increased economic development and jobs, enhanced market competition, improved delivery of e-government services, and accelerated universal, affordable Internet access for all Americans. Moreover, these networks will help promote our homeland security. In the wake of Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma, new technologies demonstrated the resiliency and reliability of communications systems that can be used by police, fire, and EMS departments every day. In the future, these locally deployed technologies can help first responders, volunteers, and local governments react quickly to disasters, particularly when old ways of communicating no longer work.

In just the past few years, our nation has lost its broadband leadership position. Having been 1<sup>st</sup> in the world in the 1990s, the United States has fallen to 16<sup>th</sup> among industrialized nations in broadband subscriptions per 100 inhabitants. In fact, less than half of all U.S. households subscribe to broadband services, a reflection of high prices, too few choices, and unavailability of attractive services. The only bright spot for the United States is in the deployment of broadband wireless access points, where the United States continues to rank 1<sup>st</sup>, in part as a result of the emergence of municipal systems. Many countries that are outpacing us in broadband deployment, including Canada, Japan, and South Korea, have successfully combined municipal systems with privately deployed networks to bring high-speed broadband to their citizens. The United States can match their success, but only if community leaders can develop networks that make sense for their communities, including public-private partnerships and systems wholly owned by municipalities.

At the turn of the last century, when the private sector failed to provide electric service to much of America, thousands of community leaders stepped forward to form their own electric utilities. Now, communities across America are ready to provide broadband access to their citizens, offering competitive alternatives for their consideration.

Nothing better illustrates how these public-private partnerships can serve America than the decision by the City of New Orleans to construct a wireless mesh network “cloud” available to the public. This network is helping bring back businesses, residents, students, and tourists. It will improve public safety and access to needed public services and information. And perhaps most

importantly, it shows the world the “can do” spirit of America. Hurricane Katrina may have washed away the old copper lines and coax cables, but the City of New Orleans is now embarked on an effort to rebuild itself stronger than before.

Beyond New Orleans, communities across America are ready and eager to bring the economic and social benefits of broadband access to their citizens. This past summer, cities such as Philadelphia and Anaheim developed creative ways to partner with the private sector. In addition, the voters of Lafayette, Louisiana rejected an effort to limit their high-speed options by a margin of 62%-38% and decided instead to fund a municipal broadband network. Today, over 300 cities have chosen to build competitive broadband access networks, and hundreds more are now in the planning stages. They should be encouraged to move forward and should have the freedom to choose what makes the most sense for their citizens.

The undersigned trade associations, public interest organizations, local government organizations, and private companies may not agree on various provisions of the draft bill, but we all share a common commitment to enhancing the availability of broadband services throughout the country. We thus urge you to adopt Title IV of the bill, without amendment, because its enactment will further this vital goal.

Thank you for your consideration.

American Association of Law Libraries  
American Public Power Association  
Broadband Over Power Lines Industry Association  
California League of Cities  
EarthLink Corp.  
eBay, Inc.  
EDUCAUSE  
Fiber to the Home Council  
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Intel Corp.  
Media Access Project  
One Economy Corporation  
Public Knowledge  
Public Technology Institute  
Rural Broadband Coalition  
Skype  
TeleCommUnity  
Tropos Networks  
United Telecom Council  
XO Communications

cc: Members of the Energy and Commerce Committee