

February 29, 2024



The Honorable Melissa Hortman
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Re: Community Broadband Solutions Are Critical to Connect All Minnesota Residents

Dear House Speaker Hortman, House Speaker Pro Tempore Wolgamott, Majority Leader Long, and Minority Leader Demuth,

Residents living in every corner of Minnesota need high-quality, reliable, and affordable Internet access for economic growth, educational attainment, financial management, specialized healthcare access, and countless other daily functions. Next Century Cities is a nonpartisan 501(c)(3) focused on supporting local officials and community leaders in their efforts to bring high-quality and affordable service within reach for every resident, including in six member municipalities in Minnesota.

Locally owned and operated broadband networks are well known to provide lower, more transparent prices while offering fast, reliable Internet, and notably good customer service.¹ Statewide, local governments have established their own broadband solutions to fill critical service gaps and revitalize their community's economy.²

Thousands of Minnesota residents enjoy fast, reliable service thanks to municipally built networks and public-private partnerships. Dakota County's future-focused fiber deployment strategies, which started in the 1990s, now connect anchor

¹ See generally David Talbot, Kira Hessekiel, and Danielle Kehl, Community-Owned Fiber Networks: Value Leaders in America (Jan. 10, 2018), <https://cyber.harvard.edu/publications/2018/01/communityfiber> (finding that municipal broadband pricing offered clear and consistent pricing compared to private providers who offered promotional rates that increased sharply after 12 months.); Claire Park, Community Broadband: The Fast, Affordable Internet Option That's Flying Under the Radar (May 20th, 2020), <https://www.newamerica.org/oti/reports/community-broadband/> ("By prioritizing the needs of the community and end users, rather than return on investment, [community broadband] networks keep internet access affordable and high-quality. Such networks, by introducing competition in an area, can also increase pressure on incumbent providers to provide better services.").

² See Ry Marcattilio-McCracken and Christopher Mitchell, Minnesota Broadband: Land of 10,000 Connectivity Solutions (July 2021), <https://ilsr.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/072021-MN-Broadband-Report.pdf>.



institutions with high-speed broadband connections, while providing the necessary infrastructure for last-mile business and residential service.³ Lessons from Dakota County also inspired similar endeavors in Scott County, which built a fiber backbone that drew new jobs and investment to the community at less than the cost of continuing to lease access directly from Internet service providers.⁴

Municipal broadband providers offer services that invite business investment into local communities, enable more efficient government services, and improve residents' quality of life. House File 3679 ("HF 3679") would amplify those efforts.

Empowering local governments to provide broadband service through high-speed, reliable, publicly built networks could improve consumer choice and increase incentives for quality improvement from private providers. With over \$650 million available from the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment program, HF 3679 could ensure that communities have access to unprecedented funding opportunities for network deployment.

There are local and statewide benefits associated with Minnesota communities being able to take full advantage of any and all resources aimed at improving digital infrastructure. Equipping local governments with the authority to provide service wherever they build networks could further statewide goals of connecting all residents with high quality broadband needed for employment, education, healthcare, and other indispensable services.

Minnesota legislative remedies should support a collaborative approach to expanding broadband access. That requires inviting local approaches that redefine connectivity for Minnesotans who have persistently struggled to get online.

Sincerely,

Next Century Cities

³ *Id.*, at 7-10.

⁴ *Id.*, at 11-13.

