



March 8, 2022

The Honorable Bryce Edgmon  
Alaska State Capitol  
Room 410  
Juneau AK, 99801

RE: HB363 Broadband, Office, Grants, Parity  
Dear Representative Edgmon,

MTA is supportive of the recently introduced, HB363 "An Act establishing the office of broadband; creating the broadband adjustment parity fund; establishing the Statewide Advisory Board; and providing for an effective date."

MTA is a leading broadband provider, empowering its member-owners and patrons to live a connected life. We have been delivering advanced communication services to Southcentral Alaska residents since 1953.

HB363 adopts the recommendations of the Governor's Task Force on Broadband to support access to improved broadband services for Alaskans. Establishing the Office of Broadband in the Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development will enable the State of Alaska to participate in the programs created by the Infrastructure, Investment, and Jobs Act of 2021 and access an unprecedented level of funding dedicated to extending broadband service throughout Alaska.

MTA is focused on investing in Alaska's broadband infrastructure and is eager to accelerate that work through the new infrastructure programs being implemented.

We fully support HB363 as it provides important tools to support implementation of these programs and will result in increased access to broadband and its benefits for our member-owners.

As always, thank you for your leadership and dedication to the important deployment of broadband services for Alaskans.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael C. Burke". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Michael" being the most prominent part.

Michael C. Burke



Juneau 907.586.5211  
Fairbanks 907.526.5211  
Other Areas 800.478.5211



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*Native Village of Minto P.O. Box 26 Minto, Alaska 99758 ph (907) 734-7112*

*[mintovillagecouncil@netnet.net](mailto:mintovillagecouncil@netnet.net)*

*[kath.charlie@netnet.net](mailto:kath.charlie@netnet.net)*

Ch'echalvu



Redzevh Ti Xw' ana



Tonidra Ghetslina



Tsivhyu



Artwork by Knowland Silas

March 17, 2022

The Honorable Bryce Edgmon  
Alaska State Capitol, Rm. 410  
Juneau, AK 99801

Re: HB363 Broadband Office

Dear Representative Edgmon:

This letter is in support of HB363 and the creation of an Alaska Broadband Office and advisory board. Increased reliable, affordable broadband accessibility for all Alaskans is a necessity. Assuring that our unserved and underserved rural areas are not left out of this once in a generation opportunity is also critical.

Thank you for incorporating the majority of the recommendation of the Governor's Task Force on Broadband. The Broadband task force recommended setting up regional advisory boards. We recommend that the nine-member statewide advisory board recommended in the bill include equal representation by rural and urban users and require all regions be represented. By maintaining the goal of connecting ALL Alaskans, our state will reap the greatest benefits.

Bridging the digital divide and providing digital equity are key. The addition of the Broadband Parity Adjustment Fund will help make the service affordable, and we welcome this addition to the HB363.

Thank you for your support of bridging the digital divide and bringing a coordinated statewide effort to delivering high speed broadband to all.

Sincerely

Chief Joe Alexander  
Native Village of Minto

"In the old days everybody belonged to a clan. In Minto there are four clans:  
Caribou - (Redzevh Ti Xw' ana) Fiskail (Ch'echalvu) Point - (Tsivhyu) Middle (Tonidra Ghetslina)" - Chief Peter John  
Council Members: 1st Chief Joseph Alexander, 2nd Chief Johnathan David, Sec./Tres. Lori Baker,  
Member Lindberg Charlie, Member Eileen Charlie



Alaska Telecom Association  
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March 3, 2022

The Honorable Bryce Edgmon  
Alaska State Capitol  
Room 410  
Juneau AK, 99801

RE: HB363 Broadband, Office, Grants, Parity

Dear Representative Edgmon,

Thank you for introducing HB363, "An Act establishing the office of broadband; creating the broadband adjustment parity fund; establishing the Statewide Advisory Board; and providing for an effective date."

Alaska Telecom Association (ATA) is the statewide association of telecommunications companies. Our members provide Alaskans with advanced telecommunications services including broadband, landline, and wireless services. Since 2017 ATA's members have invested over \$1 billion building Alaska's networks and continue working to connect all Alaskans.

We support HB363. The bill adopts the recommendations of the Governor's Task Force on Broadband to support access to improved broadband services for Alaskans. Establishing the Office of Broadband in the Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development will enable the State of Alaska to participate in the programs created by the Infrastructure, Investment, and Jobs Act of 2021 and access an unprecedented level of funding dedicated to extending broadband service throughout Alaska. Establishing the broadband parity adjustment will help support expanded access to broadband for Alaskans. And the new Statewide Broadband Advisory Board will provide the Office of Broadband with important input from a diverse stakeholder group, helping the Office to achieve its goal to expand broadband access for Alaskans.

ATA's members continue to invest in Alaska's broadband infrastructure and are eager to accelerate that work through the new infrastructure programs being implemented. HB363 provides important tools to support implementation of these programs and will result in increased access to broadband and all its benefits for Alaskans.

Thank you for your leadership and commitment to advancing broadband services for Alaskans. We look forward to supporting your office and HB363.

Sincerely,

Christine O'Connor  
Executive Director



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Member of the National League of Cities and the National Association of Counties

The Honorable Bryce Edgmon  
Alaska State Legislature  
120 4<sup>th</sup> St., State Capitol  
Juneau, AK 99801

RE: In support of HB363

Dear Representative Edgmon,

Thank you for your sponsorship of HB363, establishing the office of broadband, creating the broadband parity adjustment fund, and establishing the Statewide Broadband Advisory Board.

Having served on the Governor's Task Force on Broadband this last year, alongside leaders from around the state, I know how timely and important this issue is. The Task Force put a great deal of effort into its work and final report; it is gratifying to see it reflected in this piece of legislation. I was personally involved in the policy working group and the three actions of HB363 encapsulates the vast majority of this work – statewide coordination, meaningful input into decision-making processes, and methods to address both infrastructure buildout and affordability for Alaskans.

AML supports this legislation as drafted. It provides sufficient guidance to the State and necessary authorities without overcomplicating the process with minutiae. We recognize that this legislation is a critical and necessary first step along a long road to be able to fully meet Alaska's broadband needs. In future years there will need to be additional actions, potentially, but these will emerge once the State has sufficient building blocks in place, and as federal investment becomes clearer. The list of recommendations from the Task Force should be considered part of a roadmap, which HB363 enables. We don't have to solve for everything right away, but be patient and responsive as needs and opportunity arise.

I have attached a summary of observations that AML produced at the conclusion of the Task Force's work. I think you'll find that they mirror the sentiment expressed thus far, and that HB363 provides the tools with which the State can serve to deliver beneficial outcomes to Alaskans for years to come.

Respectfully,

Nils Andreassen  
Executive Director

## **Summary from AML's Perspective**

### **Assessing New Technologies**

We heard from stakeholders about the likelihood and reality that satellite technologies may provide timely broadband solutions to remote communities. LEO and GEO efforts are critical components of a broadband strategy and the State will benefit from an approach that is mindful of how and when these may be best deployed, and by whom. While this final report has tried to stay technology neutral, it has also said that fiber is a gold standard. If that's the case, then the State's approach to an infrastructure backbone should rest on a long-term effort to implement fiber. By no means does that preclude parallel efforts that addresses the immediate needs of communities, and the report's recommendations provide for ways in which both fiber and newer technologies can meet Alaska's needs. The Task Force has been cognizant of and wrestled with how to deploy limited resources, and ultimately the criteria for project development allows a wide range of choices. We expect that the State's Office of Broadband Deployment will stay fully apprised of technological advancements and can weigh those alongside the priorities outlined herein.

### **Timing**

Part of the conflict in decision-making, relative to fiber and LEO/GEO, is timing. Alaskans are right to want immediate relief from poor broadband service and high costs. Building out a fiber backbone – thinking long-term – is a long-term prospect. This strategy is one that then allows future investment to be maximized; it's a process that builds on project efforts sequentially, lowering costs and improving quality along the way. The time that takes, however, means that communities who don't benefit immediately may feel left behind or out. That's an important reason the Task Force recommended a Parity Adjustment, such that relief still comes to those in need. The State's aren't the only efforts that will make a difference – making a difference will mean a team approach.

### **Enhancing Partnership and Engagement**

The Task Force has recommended the implementation of an Office of Broadband Deployment, and the creation of Regional Broadband Advisory Committees. There are a number of things to note that are worth consideration. The Task Force has assigned to the Office a very long list of responsibilities – it is not imagined that all of these are taken up at once, nor that they can all be accomplished immediately. In fact, the Office will need to take its time to establish its capacity, capability, and competency.

Therefore, it likely requires a stepwise approach that means the Office can tackle the immediate and necessary while building toward the long-term and sustainable. Regional Broadband Advisory Committees are the Task Force's answer to the inclusivity necessary and requested by Alaskans. This is where local governments and Tribes have a seat at the table to be part of broadband deployment in Alaska. These are necessary and integral mechanisms for ensuring that partnership occurs. We expect that by implementing both a strong State Office dedicated to broadband oversight, and regional planning bodies, the State will be in a position

to address challenges on the front-end of a project and strategy, rather than face hurdles later on.

### **Pricing and Affordability**

The Task Force included affordability as a criteria and goal of State broadband deployment – it's a driving factor in both the quality of service that Alaskans deserve and a springboard to economic development. The step not taken was to recommend specific ways to address pricing that consumers experience. There were a number of proposals considered, from price gouging legislation to a net profits tax, to changes within the Regulatory Council of Alaska. Ultimately, these were felt outside the scope of the Task Force and will need to be addressed by legislative or regulatory action. The considerations, though, or calls for improvement, are important to highlight. Many have argued that the scale of public investment into what will be private infrastructure should be coupled with public oversight over the difference that makes to the consumer. The way in which the Task Force addressed this was through the capacity and responsibilities of the Office of Broadband Deployment. That Office will have 1) data and 2) measurable outcomes from its project deployment, vetting of project applications, and overall mapping and information acquisition. In many ways, the State should have insight into price and affordability in ways that it hasn't before. This may foster an opportunity for different policy decisions in the future. Ultimately, the Task Force's recommendations provide a strong platform for oversight in the public interest. One of the fundamental principles with which the Task Force has approached broadband deployment is equity, and efforts by the State should and will include that as a priority.

### **Accessibility**

With broadband speeds, affordability, and reliability all being critical aspects of building out Alaska's broadband infrastructure, equitable access to broadband once it is available in a given location is often overlooked. This can be thought of at both a macro and micro level – communities just beyond the build out, or neighborhoods on the outskirts or even within densely populated areas; availability of broadband at speeds and a price that are meaningful and affordable to consumers cannot be left out of State planning efforts and action. Impediments to quality service can be both circumstantial – tress on a neighbor's property – or systemic – inadequate resources and competing priorities result in delays to build out. Alaskans experience this in different ways, where during COVID-19 pandemic schools were closed and internet access was available in the parking lot, or in daily life for remote schools, businesses, tribes, local governments, and health clinics, where participation in activities is hampered by access that is out of reach. Alaska's broadband strategy includes, and the Task Force wants to highlight, pathways to addressing this patchwork of coverage. Equity in broadband services being offered will ensure that Alaska has villages, towns and neighborhoods similar to that of their peers. An equitable strategy will be Alaska-driven and in the public interest, leveraging federal investment and private partnerships but maintaining local control, the State's priorities, and the public's well-being. Broadband access is an important part of modern Alaska's infrastructure needs.



March 2, 2022

The Honorable Bryce Edgmon  
Alaska State Capitol  
120 4<sup>th</sup> St State Capitol  
Juneau, Alaska 99801

RE: House Bill 363 – Broadband, Office, Grants, Parity

Dear Representative Edgmon,

Thank you for introducing House Bill 363 “An Act establishing the office of broadband; creating the broadband adjustment parity fund; establishing the Statewide Advisory Board; and providing for an effective date.”

As one of Alaska’s largest broadband and managed IT service providers with a 120+ year history serving Alaskans, we are ready to support the State in delivering affordable, reliable, high-speed broadband to all.

We support House Bill 363 creating the Office of Broadband in the Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development (DCCED) to accept and distribute federal broadband infrastructure dollars in the following order of priority: unserved areas, underserved areas, and anchor institutions.

House Bill 363 follows guidelines set forth in both the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and Governor Dunlevy’s Task Force on Broadband recommendations. It is a critical step the State must take before it is eligible for federal Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment funding.

We support making broadband affordable by establishing the Broadband Parity Adjustment Fund and ensuring the State can take full advantage of federal programs that can benefit Alaskans. We are glad that the newly established federal Affordable Broadband Connectivity program will support eligible Alaska households with a bill credit of up to \$75/month for broadband service. The Broadband Parity Adjustment Fund may be able to build on this existing federal program, rather than replace it, since the goals are so similar. For example, The Broadband Parity Adjustment Fund could provide an additional benefit for Alaskans who need a greater subsidy than the federal program provides. It could also provide support to enroll Alaskans in the federal program or administer grants to non-profits to assist in enrollments. A primary goal of the state broadband office could be to maximize federal spending on broadband affordability in Alaska by ensuring that all eligible Alaskans are able to participate in the Affordable Connectivity Program. We are working on refining these ideas and will follow up shortly with some specific suggestions.

We appreciate your leadership and know that by working together we can connect more Alaskans with high-speed internet than ever before.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Heather Cavanaugh'.

Heather Cavanaugh  
Senior Director, External Affairs and Corporate Communication



March 7, 2022

The Honorable Bryce Edgmon  
Alaska State Capitol  
120 4th Street, Room 410  
Juneau, Alaska 99801

RE: House Bill 363 – Broadband, Office, Grants, Parity

Dear Representative Edgmon:

We appreciate your leadership in sponsoring House Bill 363 “Broadband: Office, Grants, Parity” based on the hard work of Governor Dunleavy’s Broadband Task Force this past summer. The task force spent hundreds of hours of hearing from qualified, engaged Alaskans representing a broad range of stakeholders and communities. We appreciate your efforts to amplify those voices and carrying this important work forward.

GCI has been delivering connectivity to Alaskans for more than 40 years and we are well-versed in the challenges of providing broadband service to rural communities and in Arctic environments. To expand Alaska’s broadband infrastructure and close the digital divide, we concur with the framework of this legislation: standing up an Office of Broadband Deployment in the Department of Commerce, Community, and Regional Development; targeting unserved and underserved communities; prioritizing local workforce development; maximizing federal partnerships by establishing a federal grant-matching fund, streamlining state permitting; and establishing a broadband parity adjustment fund.

As you stated in the February 1<sup>st</sup> House Finance hearing, this is a once-in-a-generation opportunity for Alaska. It cannot be overstated how important it is that we follow the federal guidelines set forth in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to maximize Alaska’s eligibility for Broadband Equity, Access & Deployment funds. HB 363 will help ensure this is an achievable goal.

Again, thank you for your initiative on this legislation to help bring reliable, high-speed, affordable broadband to every Alaskan.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Windt  
Pearson

Digitally signed by Rebecca Windt  
Pearson  
Date: 2022.03.07 17:02:08 -09'00'

Rebecca Windt Pearson  
Senior Vice President, Law and Corporate Advocacy, and General Counsel





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March 8, 2022

House Labor & Commerce Committee  
Alaska Legislature  
Juneau, AK 99801

RE: HB363 Support

Dear Rep Fields, Spohnholz, Schrage, Nelson, Snyder, Kaufman, McCarty;

AARP Alaska supports HB363 to authorize the implementation of the architecture for successful universal Broadband deployment for all Alaskans, as proposed by the Governor's Task Force on Broadband

AARP is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that works on issues that matter to elders and their families, including caregiving, aging in place, and access to affordable high-speed internet service, also known as broadband.

Alaska has the fastest growing senior population in the country and most of us want to stay in Alaska as we age. Ubiquitous, affordable, adequate high-speed internet access can help make this possible, benefiting all segments of our society including seniors.

For elders, access to broadband makes aging in place more possible by providing access to telehealth, civic engagement, entrepreneurship, teleworking, connections with friends and family, educational opportunities, and access to vital assistance programs. Aging in place is good for elders, families, communities, and for the State of Alaska, as it reduces the cost of long-term care to the State budget dramatically.

For our elders, poor or no broadband access and a lack of affordability not only limits access to essential public health info, social services, telehealth, and apps that manage chronic conditions and support caregivers, but it also leads to risk of social isolation, which has been linked to negative health outcomes, reduced quality of life and premature death.

**AARP Alaska supports HB363 to establish the Alaska Broadband Office in the Department of Commerce and Community Development, create the Broadband Parity Adjustment Fund, and establish the Statewide Broadband Advisory Board to increase access, affordability to high-speed internet and digital equity for older Alaskans. We would encourage you to ensure that the Advisory Boards include consumer representatives who can speak to the interests of a diverse base of consumers, including older consumers.**

Respectfully, Marge Stoneking  
Advocacy Director, AARP Alaska



**Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference**  
March 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup>, 2022 • The Hotel Captain Cook

**MEMBERSHIP RESOLUTION FY22-04**

**A RESOLUTION BY THE SOUTHWEST ALASKA MUNICIPAL CONFERENCE  
MEMBERSHIP SUPPORTING HB 363 “AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE OFFICE OF  
BROADBAND; CREATING THE BROADBAND PARITY ADJUSTMENT FUND  
AND ESTABLISHING THE STATEWIDE BROADBAND ADVISORY BOARD”**

**WHEREAS**, the number of communities in our region -both unserved and underserved- by Broadband is one of the highest in the state; and

**WHEREAS**, there is an unprecedented level of federal funding for broadband grants in Alaska that is intended to build out modern middle and last mile infrastructure in all regions of the state; and

**WHEREAS**, HB 363 establishes important guidelines for Alaska to qualify for nearly two billion dollars of broadband funds, while creating parity between urban and rural Alaska customers in a manner that allows for high speed, reliable internet services to be provided in an affordable and equitable manner; and

**WHEREAS**, HB 363 also establishes the Broadband Parity Adjustment Fund (BPAF), which is a separate fund in the Alaska treasury, modeled after the Federal Communications Commission’s (FCC) Emergency Broadband Benefit. The BPAF is created with the express purpose of offsetting consumer costs and making grants to eligible beneficiaries to improve the performance and access to services where, in many instances, it does not currently exist; and

**WHEREAS**, HB 363 creates the Statewide Broadband Advisory Board to provide informed recommendations on broadband policy goals and objectives. The board will act in an advisory capacity to the Broadband Office to identify project proposals and develop criteria for mapping and data collection, while striving to fulfill the long list of recommendations that emerged from the extensive work of the Governor’s Task Force on Broadband; and

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that the Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference Membership strongly supports the passage of HB 363 in this Legislative session to start the process of bringing middle and final mile broadband infrastructure to rural Alaska swiftly and efficiently.

**PASSED AND ADOPTED** by the Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference Membership this 5th day of March 2022.



***Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference***  
March 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup>, 2022 • The Hotel Captain Cook

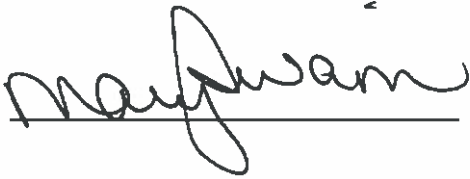
IN WITNESS THERETO:

Paul Gronholdt, SWAMC Board President

Shirley Marquardt, SWAMC Executive Director

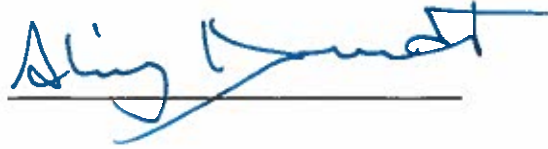
**PASSED AND ADOPTED** by the Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference Membership this 5th day of March 2021.

IN WITNESS THERETO:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mary Marquardt", written over a horizontal line.

Mary  
SWAMC

President  
Marquardt, SWAMC Executive Director

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Shirley Swain", written over a horizontal line.

Swain,  
Board  
Shirley

March 16, 2022

HB 363

Dear Committee Members,

Over the last 40 years, the telecommunications industry in Alaska has been clearly defined – it’s an expensive market to enter and the incumbent telecoms have a very strong lobby. Eventually, broadband became a second revenue stream for the telecoms. As small-town entrepreneurs, satellite middle mile providers and (recently) Tribes started offering more affordable broadband in their communities, efforts were focused on controlling federal funds and policymaking which favors the incumbents. Ultimately, they’ve been very successful in limiting market entry (competition) and strengthening their regional monopoly holdings in rural Alaska. It’s worth noting, the Alaska Telecom Association (ATA) does not represent these groups.

Today, we are thankful for the committee process and the opportunity to offer a non-ATA voice. These are our suggested amendments:

#### ***ENCOURAGE COMPETITION***

- **Remove subjective wording that limits a Tribe, Tribal consortium, or ISP from being an eligible entity:** Page 1, Line 13 “make grants to eligible grantees and prioritize grants to grantees with in-state experience, qualifications, and expertise needed to deploy, operate, repair, and maintain broadband infrastructure;”
- **Remove subjective wording that limits technology:** Page 1, Line 14 “latency”; Page 3, Line 7 and Page 3, Line 11 “With a latency sufficient to support” and replace with “capable of supporting”; and Page 2, Line 2 “identify scalable and sustainable technologies that meet the needs of state residents into the future; and”
- **Replace subjective wording that limits industry representation:** Page 4, Line 27-28 “the broadband industry” with “two members of the broadband industry representing competing technologies”
- **If a technical committee is created, add two industry seats to diversify industry representation:** “two members of the broadband industry representing competing technologies”

#### ***ENCOURAGE SOUND ECONOMIC DECISIONS***

- **Replace AS 44.33.910 (b)(2) with “develop near-term and long-term strategies for deploying affordable broadband statewide using the following criteria: impact on consumer costs, timeline for deployment, breadth of coverage, sustainability without further subsidy, reliability, speed, and employing multiple technologies as required while maintaining technological neutrality and without duplicating existing federal programs.”; and add Page 2, Line 13 “that supports the near-term and long-term strategies referenced in the AS 44.33.910(b)(2)**



The Infrastructure and Investment Jobs Act defines “unserved” and “underserved”, but all other rules are given great latitude at the state level. Contrary to popular belief, states now have legal room to self-regulate broadband. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit upheld a California network neutrality law and “dismissed arguments that the California law conflicts with the federal Communications Act and that the act precludes regulation of internet access because such access is an interstate service.”<sup>1</sup>

Not that Pacific Dataport supports regulating broadband, but the Alaska Legislature has the right to create a state broadband office and rules that will help Alaskans address the unique needs of our state. We should do so encouraging robust competition and fiscally sound economic decisions.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Shawn Williams

Shawn Williams  
VP of Government Affairs & Strategy  
Pacific Dataport, Inc.  
4701 Business Park Blvd., Unit #J-24  
Anchorage, AK 99503

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<sup>1</sup> Cooley. (2022). “Ninth Circuit Opens Door to State-Level Regulation of Internet Access.” Accessed 15 March 2022. <https://www.cooley.com/news/insight/2022/2022-02-08-ninth-circuit-state-level-regulation-internet-access>.

## **House Labor & Commerce Committee**

### **HB363 Testimony**

**Comments by Mike Navarre, Anand Vadapalli and Diane Kaplan on 3/16/2022.**

#### **Mike Navarre:**

1. Chairwoman Spohnholz, Chairman Fields, Committee Members,
2. I'm Mike Navarre from Kenai, Alaska, and I serve on the Rasmuson Foundation Board of Directors. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the House Labor & Commerce Committee on this important topic and opportunity.
3. The Rasmuson Foundation has been tracking the broadband topic and multiple funding opportunities presented by the federal programs. Like you, we recognize these programs as a once in a generation opportunity to provide ALL Alaskans the critical infrastructure necessary to fully participate in the digital world.
4. Access to affordable internet is an issue that impacts many of the things we work on as a Foundation, such as providing Alaskans access to high-quality healthcare, educational opportunities and jobs.
5. We believe reliable, high-speed internet is the right of every Alaskan, and necessary to be an engaged citizen of our state and connected to the world.
6. The Foundation board has recently agreed to fund an effort to support broadband deployment in Alaska, with the goal of helping both the state and tribes maximize the opportunity, particularly rural and underserved communities where broadband is currently unavailable or not affordable.

7. While there are great opportunities, there are also several challenges, including competition for technical expertise, grant writers, contractors, materials, etc.
8. The funding opportunities available to the State of Alaska and separately to Alaska Tribes cry out for a coordinated effort to assure the maximum benefit to all areas and citizens of Alaska.
9. Our interest is to assist in these efforts in any way we can benefit Alaska. Whether through convening various interests, networking, coordinating or communications, we're here to assist your efforts to successfully provide Alaskans affordable access to broadband.
10. Next, it's my pleasure to introduce Anand Vadapalli. As the former CEO of Alaska Communications, Anand played an invaluable role in helping us strategize around how Rasmuson Foundation could help maximize this opportunity.
11. Anand ...

**Anand's comments**

1. ... Thank you, Mike.
2. I will focus my prepared remarks on the importance of the State's proposed broadband office with some recommendations on structure, governance, organization and charter for such an office.
3. The Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment program, also known as the BEAD program, established by the IIJA, will distribute \$42.45 billion in broadband deployment funding to states and U.S. territories, which will sub-grant funds to broadband providers to connect unserved and underserved areas. A large portion of the funds will only be



distributed once the FCC releases final maps detailing nationwide broadband availability, expected in Fall of 2022. The State of Alaska is the eligible entity to receive funding under the BEAD program.

4. As the eligible entity, the State has significant responsibilities including coordination, communication, planning, governance, and oversight.
5. Additionally, there are other funding opportunities including the Tribal Connectivity Grant Program and the Digital Equity Act programs that provide opportunities for a variety of other eligible entities including Tribal Nations, Alaska Native Corporations, State Agencies, Non-Profits, and other community anchor institutions. The State of Alaska will have an important leadership and coordination role with these other programs.
6. The responsibilities of the State of Alaska under the BEAD program and for coordination with these other programs are discharged through the creation and effective functioning of a broadband office established by the State. Such an office is crucial to the State competing effectively for the funding available under the various programs, and for the effective governance and oversight of funding as received by the State.
7. Further, the timeline for the investment spans several years. It is reasonable to expect that funding decisions by the relevant federal agencies will extend well into 2023. Eligible entities and sub-grantees that receive funding typically have up to four years for deployment of the approved infrastructure. Benefits to communities around Alaska will commence four to six years from today. Considering the pace of technology innovation, it's reasonable to expect that there will be meaningful technology developments in

broadband during this period, necessitating continued planning for the State's broadband infrastructure and ensuring that Alaskans continue to benefit from this foundational technology for the long term.

8. The Committee should take a long-term perspective in establishing the structure, governance, organization and charter of the State's broadband office to ensure policy and operational continuity spanning changes in both Administration and Legislature that are bound to occur over this long period of time.
9. The Foundation has had the benefit of reviewing best practices across various States. We highlight certain common components of successful state broadband programs as below:

- a. **Strong Leadership** from governors, legislators, and agency heads. If the governor's office is focused on broadband, it will bring more attention to the issue. Legislative champions can help keep the topic at the forefront in the Legislature, introduce measures, and educate their peers.
- b. **Dedicated staff** who are focused on broadband and can develop expertise, creating accountability and responsibility, and providing stakeholders with a point of contact.
- c. **Visible and responsive** broadband directors and staff who attend meetings and events around the state, including informational sessions about the state's grant program, broadband committee meetings, and ribbon cuttings or check presentations for grant projects.

**d. Connectors or people who can** build strong relationships with multiple stakeholder groups and are viewed by them as a trusted partner. They provide a neutral voice when educating policymakers and community leaders and become a reliable resource for information on broadband. As a result, they often play a central role in facilitating coordination and building partnerships to advance broadband projects and policy.

**10.** The Foundation proposes that the State Broadband Office be stood up with urgency, with governance membership of such an Office appointed by both the Governor and the Legislature, reflecting the principles of shared leadership we previously articulated.

**11.** In the spirit of providing dedicated resources, we recommend that the Legislature establish and provide for an operating budget for the Broadband Office that would provide for an appropriate level of staffing and operational funding necessary for the Office to discharge its duties, including an Executive Director to serve as the administrative head of such Office. Again, based on organization structures we have reviewed for other States, we recommend that the Office have adequate resources in two distinct areas:

- a.** Digital Equity and Inclusion with capabilities in statewide planning, digital capacity and equity development, community outreach and coordination and communications, and
- b.** Grant Program Management with capabilities in grant management, technical planning and mapping, and sub-grantee coordination, oversight and management.

**12.** The purpose and charter for this Office can be defined to promote the deployment and use of high-speed affordable broadband in Alaska to the benefit of Alaskans. Duties could include:

- a.** Establishing **policy** frameworks by setting well-defined goals and a clear policy direction for legislative and administrative agencies.
- b.** **Planning**, assessing the adequacy of current infrastructure, and establishing a living broadband roadmap for Alaska.
- c.** **Engaging a broad range of stakeholders** to ensure proper input is received
- d.** **Funding and operating** approved broadband infrastructure projects and capacity building programs including training and workforce development.
- e.** **Evaluating** broadband investments and making sure they continue to evolve with need and technology developments over time.

**13.** The Foundation believes that this approach for creating and empowering the Alaska Broadband Office will create immediate near-term benefit to maximize the funding to Alaska, while maximizing long-term value to Alaskans from current and future investments in broadband.

**14.** I now invite Diane to offer comments on how Rasmuson Foundation can contribute to this important initiative ... Diane ...

**Diane's comments:**

- 1. Thank you, Anand.
- 2. Chairwoman Spohnholz, Chairman Fields, Committee Members

3. I'm Diane Kaplan, President and CEO of Rasmuson Foundation. I echo Mike and Anand in thanking you for the opportunity to appear before the House Labor & Commerce Committee on this important topic.
4. As Mike mentioned, broadband impacts many of the areas that are important to Rasmuson Foundation's mission of promoting a better life for Alaskans. We want to see this effort succeed and are prepared to offer resources – both as a convener and grantmaker - to make it happen.
5. Bringing people together to discuss solutions has always been a core part of our grantmaking philosophy. As we researched how we could assist with broadband, we convened numerous stakeholder groups, including tribal leaders, nonprofits, members of the telecom industry, and prominent citizens. Some of these meetings have evolved into advisory groups which could be used as a means of disseminating information and assisting with coordination.
6. We are also prepared to assist this effort financially. Two immediate areas we could help relate to the set-up of the state's broadband office and coordination between the state and tribes.
7. Over the course of our conversations, some concern was expressed that the NTIA money designated for the set-up of broadband offices may be delayed. If this is the case, and given its crucial role, we could provide resources to allow the state to start building its broadband office.
8. Additionally, we repeatedly heard that strong coordination between tribal broadband efforts and the state was needed for Alaska to fully take advantage of this opportunity.

To that end, we could support the cost of a coordinator position to assist with communication and coordination.

9. On a targeted basis, the Foundation can engage in grantmaking with particular emphasis on workforce development, technology training for organizations and residents, and possibly even support specific projects.
10. For workforce development, it will be important that Alaska both build a workforce that can install, maintain and service broadband infrastructure and provide training and resources to allow Alaskans – particularly those in rural Alaska – to access jobs that can be done remotely. We are prepared to support with both.
11. The Foundation is also building up its own resources in preparation for assisting applicants.
12. Based on needs expressed during our stakeholder interviews, the Foundation has identified organizations that can provide technical assistance like engineering and regulatory support along with grant writers to assist with applications, particularly for Tribal partners.
13. We realize this is all coming together very quickly, and perhaps greater needs will emerge, for instance, assistance with required mapping. Please know we are invested in seeing affordable and high-speed broadband deployment succeed in Alaska. We are open to discussions on how that happens.
14. I would like to close by talking about the cost of accessing broadband once service becomes available. We believe long-term affordability for all Alaskans will be a key measure of whether our efforts are successful. We know federal subsidies will assist in

keeping costs lower for a period of time. But beyond that, there needs to be a specific strategy. An Endowment supported by federal, state and possibly philanthropic resources is one strategy to consider.

15. Thank you again for your time today and I now turn it back over to Chairwoman Spohnholz and Chair Fields for questions.