

**2014 -- H 8136 SUBSTITUTE A**

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LC005514/SUB A  
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**STATE OF RHODE ISLAND**

**IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2014**

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**J O I N T   R E S O L U T I O N**

**CREATING A SPECIAL LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION TO STUDY BROADBAND  
SERVICES AND ACCESSIBILITY**

Introduced By: Representatives Finn, Kazarian, Blazejewski, Keable, and Hearn

Date Introduced: May 01, 2014

Referred To: House Small Business

1           WHEREAS, Within the State of Rhode Island, effective economic development today  
2 requires collaboration and communication among business, local and state government,  
3 education, healthcare, tourism, and community leaders in order to grow jobs, maintain existing  
4 employment, and provide for the common good; and

5           WHEREAS, High-speed internet access, also known as broadband, has become an  
6 essential element of economic vitality, enhancing economic development and public safety for  
7 the state's communities, improving healthcare and educational opportunities, and providing a  
8 better quality of life for our state's residents; and

9           WHEREAS, Continued progress in the deployment, adoption, and utilization rate of  
10 broadband is vital to ensuring that Rhode Island remains competitive in the global economy; and

11           WHEREAS, Rhode Island is ranked number one among the United States in broadband  
12 speed and has the technical infrastructure in place to connect every Rhode Islander to high-speed  
13 internet; and

14           WHEREAS, A digital divide exists in pockets of Rhode Island that do not enjoy the  
15 benefits of high-speed broadband; and for Rhode Island to compete in the digital age,  
16 collaborative action is needed to improve Rhode Islanders' internet access to increase the  
17 integration of online learning, increased job searching, and attainment and accessibility of  
18 government resources; and

19           WHEREAS, According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2012, 75 percent of Rhode

1 Islanders accessed the internet which exceeded the national average of 74 percent, nevertheless,  
2 the state lags behind the five regional states of Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire,  
3 Vermont, and Maine; and

4 WHEREAS, Rhode Island must encourage, support, and further facilitate public/private  
5 partnerships that continue the growth, adoption, and access to broadband for all of Rhode Island's  
6 citizens and businesses, most particularly in underserved rural and urban areas; now, therefore be  
7 it

8 RESOLVED, That a special legislative commission on broadband services and  
9 accessibility be and the same is hereby created consisting of fourteen (14) members: four (4) of  
10 whom shall be members of the Senate, not more than three (3) from the same political party, to be  
11 appointed by the President of the Senate; four (4) of whom shall be members of the House, not  
12 more than three (3) from the same political party, to be appointed by the Speaker; one of whom  
13 shall be the Rhode Island Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, or designee;  
14 one of whom shall be the of the Chairperson of the Rhode Island Public Utilities Commission or  
15 designee; one of whom shall be the Executive Director of the Rhode Island Commerce  
16 Corporation, or designee; one of whom shall be the Director of the Rhode Island Emergency  
17 Management Agency or designee; one of whom shall be the Director of the Rhode Island  
18 Department of Health or designee; and one of whom shall be the Chief Information Officer of the  
19 Rhode Island Division of Information Technology, or designee.

20 In lieu of any appointment of a member of the legislature to a permanent advisory  
21 commission, a legislative study commission, or any commission created by a General Assembly  
22 resolution, the appointing authority may appoint a member of the general public to serve in lieu  
23 of a legislator, provided that the majority leader or the minority leader of the political party which  
24 is entitled to the appointment consents to the appointment of the member of the general public.

25 The purpose of said commission shall be to:

- 26 • Identify the current level of broadband service state-wide, including connection  
27 speeds for sending and receiving data that will be reasonably needed by all citizens by 2015;
- 28 • Analyze the policies and actions necessary to eliminate obstacles to the  
29 investment in and the identification of areas in the state that currently lack the infrastructure  
30 necessary to support broadband service;
- 31 • Identify and address the digital gap in both the minority and rural communities;
- 32 • Explore opportunities for potential public/private sector partnerships;
- 33 • Evaluate the various strategies, financing methods, and financial incentives used  
34 in other states and countries to support the deployment of high-speed broadband;

- 1           •       Review the security, vulnerability, and redundancy actions necessary to ensure  
2 the reliability of high-speed broadband;
- 3           •       Explore the economic development opportunities made possible by the wide  
4 dissemination of high-speed broadband;
- 5           •       Examine how access to high-speed broadband can benefit educational  
6 institutions, healthcare institutions, community-based organizations, and government institutions;  
7 and
- 8           •       Assess the current public centers for broadband access as well as potential future  
9 plans to enhance access to underserved communities throughout the state.

10           Forthwith upon passage of this resolution, the members of the commission shall meet at  
11 the call of the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House and organize. The President  
12 of the Senate and the Speaker of the House shall each select one member to serve as co-  
13 chairpersons of the commission.

14           Vacancies in said commission shall be filled in like manner as the original appointment.

15           The membership of said commission shall receive no compensation for their services.

16           All departments and agencies of the state shall furnish such advice and information,  
17 documentary and otherwise, to said commission and its agents as is deemed necessary or  
18 desirable by the commission to facilitate the purposes of this resolution.

19           The Joint Committee on Legislative Services is hereby authorized and directed to provide  
20 suitable quarters for said commission; and be it further

21           RESOLVED, That the commission shall report its findings and results to the General  
22 Assembly on or before March 31, 2015, and said commission shall expire on April 30, 2015.

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EXPLANATION  
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL  
OF  
JOINT RESOLUTION  
CREATING A SPECIAL LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION TO STUDY BROADBAND  
SERVICES AND ACCESSIBILITY

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1           This resolution would create a fourteen (14) member special legislative commission  
2 whose purpose it would be to make a comprehensive study of broadband services and  
3 accessibility throughout the state, and who would report back to the General Assembly on or  
4 before March 31, 2015, and said commission would expire on April 30, 2015.

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