

2020 -- S 2776

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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2020

SENATE RESOLUTION

RESPECTFULLY REQUESTING THE GOVERNOR TO DESIGNATE A STATE-WIDE
BROADBAND COORDINATOR AND ESTABLISH A RHODE ISLAND BROADBAND
ADVISORY COUNCIL

Introduced By: Senators Euer, DiPalma, Murray, McCaffrey, and Conley

Date Introduced: March 12, 2020

Referred To: Senate Commerce

1 WHEREAS, Rhode Island successfully utilized federal BTOP (Broadband Technologies
2 Opportunities Program) funding in 2010 so OSHEAN (Ocean State Higher Education Economic
3 Development and Administrative Network), a nonprofit that serves nonprofits, schools, and
4 government could develop, build, and operate a fiber-optic "Middle Mile"; and

5 WHEREAS, The fiber covering the State is known as the "Middle Mile" and was built in
6 2010 using 21.7 million of federal dollars and 10 million of state dollars. At that time, OSHEAN
7 was viewed as a valuable partner with the State and not just a vendor; and

8 WHEREAS, Federal dollars were used by OSHEAN to deliver the network, and the
9 federal government insists on a non-discrimination and interconnection obligation. One of the
10 fundamental principles of BTOP funding is open access; and

11 WHEREAS, Federal and State funding was used to build the "Middle Mile" yet it is still
12 inaccessible to residents, businesses, and some local municipalities; and

13 WHEREAS, High-speed internet known as "broadband" has become an essential tool in
14 the 21st century impacting every business and every Rhode Island resident; and

15 WHEREAS, High-speed internet is crucial to economic development as companies need
16 fast, reliable service; broadband access is crucial to education, community development,
17 healthcare, public safety, and local government; and

18 WHEREAS, Because of the size of Rhode Island, the State has more fiber per square
19 mile than any other state in the country; and

1 WHEREAS, When federal funding ended in 2014, Rhode Island disbanded Broadband
2 Rhode Island, a project of the RI Department of Administration in partnership with the Rhode
3 Island Commerce Corporation; and

4 WHEREAS, Rhode Island is one of only two states that do not have a broadband entity
5 or coordinator overseeing broadband initiatives, leveraging economic development opportunities,
6 accessing federal dollars, addressing issues of high-speed access, technology trends, closing the
7 digital divide, improving and making more affordable connectivity for Rhode Island residents and
8 businesses; and

9 WHEREAS, OSHEAN has 48 strands of fiber optic in cable and on telephone poles
10 throughout the State, known as the "Middle Mile"; however, it is still completely underutilized
11 with less than ten strands of fiber optic being used; now, therefore be it

12 RESOLVED, That this Senate of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
13 hereby respectfully requests the Governor to designate a state-wide Broadband coordinator
14 dedicated to the oversight of Broadband Accessibility and Internet Connectivity for the 21st
15 Century and who would be responsible for accessing federal dollars for economic development,
16 broadband policy, and coordinating any future funding efforts; and be it further

17 RESOLVED, That this Senate requests the RI Department of Administration in
18 partnership with the Rhode Island Commerce Corporation to establish a ten member Council, to
19 be known as the Rhode Island Broadband Advisory Council, consisting of volunteer stakeholders
20 from the community to be convened in order to assist the Rhode Island Broadband coordinator.
21 The composition of said Council should consist of:

- 22 1. The Secretary of the Rhode Island Commerce Corporation, or designee, to serve as
23 Chair;
- 24 2. The Director of Emergency Management, or designee;
- 25 3. The Administrator of the Department of Public Utilities Commission, or designee;
- 26 4. A member from Connect Greater Newport;
- 27 5. The Executive Director of the Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns, or designee;
- 28 6. A representative from OSHEAN;
- 29 7. Two private sector providers of broadband services;
- 30 8. The Commissioner of Rhode Island Education, or designee; and
- 31 9. A member of the Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank; and be it further

32 RESOLVED, That this Senate requests that the Council shall meet at least quarterly and
33 report to the Governor and the General Assembly its findings and recommendations for
34 enhancing broadband access in the State of Rhode Island; and be it further

1 RESOLVED, That the Secretary of State be and hereby is authorized and directed to
2 transmit duly certified copies of this resolution to the Honorable Gina Raimondo, Governor of the
3 State of Rhode Island, Brett Smiley, Director of the RI Department of Administration, and Stefan
4 Pryor, Secretary of Rhode Island Commerce Corporation.

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