



New England Connectivity and  
Telecommunications Association

**WRITTEN COMMENTS OF THE NEW ENGLAND CONNECTIVITY &  
TELECOMMUNICATIONS ASSOCIATION, INC. REGARDING H.3831**

**July 13, 2023**

Dear Chair Farley-Bouvier, Chair Moore, and Members of the Joint Committee on Advanced Information Technology, the Internet and Cybersecurity,

On behalf of the New England Connectivity and Telecommunications Association (NECTA), I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony regarding our opposition to **H.3831, *An Act to establish public internet service.***

H. 3831 would establish a program for municipalities to work with the Massachusetts Broadband Institute (“MBI”) to finance and build publicly owned broadband networks, as well as create a Commonwealth ISP that would lease capacity on public and private networks across the state to offer retail broadband service. This bill would result in a risky and misguided initiative that will not achieve its apparent goals, will waste taxpayer funds, and should be rejected for the reasons set forth below.

Deploying municipal broadband services and establishing a Commonwealth ISP are solutions in search of a problem in one of the best-connected states in the nation. Today, over 98% of Massachusetts residents and businesses have access to terrestrial, high-speed broadband infrastructure with download speeds greater than 250 Mbps, according to the Federal Communications Commission, making the Commonwealth one of the best connected places in the nation.<sup>1</sup> This high rate of broadband buildout can be attributed to the billions of dollars in investment in networks by private broadband providers across the state and the unparalleled success of the [Massachusetts Broadband Institute’s Last Mile program](#), a public-private partnership that has put all the Commonwealth’s previously unserved towns on a path to connectivity. Establishing, and funding, an entire program dedicated to building or expanding community-owned broadband infrastructure to assist unserved and underserved communities is simply no longer an issue in the Commonwealth and does nothing to address the next frontier of digital equity, removing barriers to broadband adoption.

Regardless of the Commonwealth’s high broadband deployment rate, proposals to deploy municipal broadband services and/or establish a Commonwealth ISP are high-risk propositions with little upside to consumers. Numerous studies have confirmed that the economics of building

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<sup>1</sup> [Area Summary - Fixed | FCC National Broadband Map](#)

and operating government-owned broadband networks pose a high risk to municipal budgets and taxpayers. Government-owned broadband networks are costly to build and maintain, and often fail to deliver on promises of better service or lower prices. The proposed financial mechanism in this legislation would put participating municipalities on the hook for 50 percent of the estimated cost of each public network, without explaining where that funding would come from, nor is there clear guidance on how such projects would be selected and managed. Furthermore, establishing a Commonwealth ISP that would lease capacity on public and private networks is ill-conceived as it would introduce a host of legal and technical risks into the already complex task of building and operating a high-speed broadband network.

Finally, this bill does nothing to close the digital divide. There is a significant difference between having *access* to broadband connectivity and the actual ability to *adopt* that service. Barriers to adoption include cost, language barriers, digital literacy and a host of other complex societal challenges that prevent some families – and students – from connecting to high-speed internet service. To help break down some of these obstacles, over the past decade, broadband providers in Massachusetts have invested millions of dollars in programs to help low-income individuals get connected to the high-speed internet service available at their home. NECTA’s members all offer subsidized low-cost broadband programs like Comcast’s [Internet Essentials](#) and [Internet Essentials Partnership Program \(IEPP\)](#), Charter Communication’s [Spectrum Internet Assist](#) and [Stay Connected K-12](#), and Cox Communication’s [Connect2Compete](#) which are all designed to provide affordable broadband to low-income households and to ensure that municipalities, school districts, and community-based organizations can help students and families connect to the internet at little to no cost. As Massachusetts is poised to receive over \$320 million in federal funding for broadband, policymakers should remain focused on closing the digital divide and removing barriers to adoption, not wasting taxpayer dollars on funding duplicative networks through a dubious state management scheme.

We thank you for your time and attention to this testimony. Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions.

Sincerely,

Timothy O. Wilkerson  
President

### **About NECTA**

NECTA is a five-state regional trade association representing substantially all private cable telecommunications companies in Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont. Four NECTA members have a presence in Massachusetts, including Charter Communications, Comcast, Cox Communications, and Breezeline, which is headquartered in Quincy. Together, NECTA members invest over \$1.5 billion annually in the Commonwealth and employ over 6,000 residents throughout New England.