2014 -- H 8136 SUBSTITUTE A

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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2014

JOINT RESOLUTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

WHEREAS, According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2012, 75 percent of Rhode
Islanders accessed the internet which exceeded the national average of 74 percent, nevertheless, the state lags behind the five regional states of Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Maine; and

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

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

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

The purpose of said commission shall be to:

• Identify the current level of broadband service state-wide, including connection speeds for sending and receiving data that will be reasonably needed by all citizens by 2015;
• Analyze the policies and actions necessary to eliminate obstacles to the investment in and the identification of areas in the state that currently lack the infrastructure necessary to support broadband service;
• Identify and address the digital gap in both the minority and rural communities;
• Explore opportunities for potential public/private sector partnerships;
• Evaluate the various strategies, financing methods, and financial incentives used in other states and countries to support the deployment of high-speed broadband;
• Review the security, vulnerability, and redundancy actions necessary to ensure the reliability of high-speed broadband;
• Explore the economic development opportunities made possible by the wide dissemination of high-speed broadband;
• Examine how access to high-speed broadband can benefit educational institutions, healthcare institutions, community-based organizations, and government institutions; and
• Assess the current public centers for broadband access as well as potential future plans to enhance access to underserved communities throughout the state.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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