

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2014

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: Senators Pichardo, Paiva Weed, Algieri, Conley, and Goodwin

Date Introduced: March 25, 2014

Referred To: Senate Special Legislation and Veterans Affairs

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 twelve (12) 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; and one of whom shall be the Chief Information Officer of the Rhode
17 Island Division of Information Technology, or designee.

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

23 The purpose of said commission shall be to:

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

1 dissemination of high-speed broadband;

2 • Examine how access to high-speed broadband can benefit educational
3 institutions, healthcare institutions, community-based organizations, and government institutions;
4 and

5 • Assess the current public centers for broadband access as well as potential future
6 plans to enhance access to underserved communities throughout the state.

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

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

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

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

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

18 RESOLVED, That the commission shall report its findings and results to the General
19 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

- 1 This resolution would create a twelve (12) member special legislative commission whose
- 2 purpose it would be to make a comprehensive study of broadband services and accessibility
- 3 throughout the state, and who would report back to the General Assembly on or before March 31,
- 4 2015, and said commission would expire on April 30, 2015.

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