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April 29, 2010

VIA ELECTRONIC AND HAND DELIVERY

Hon. Gary F. Locke
Secretary of Commerce

Hon. Lawrence E. Strickling
Assistant Secretary for Communications and Information
National Telecommunications and Information Administration

U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20230

Re: MassBroadband 123 in Round 2 BTOP (Easygrants ID: 4722)

Dear Secretary Locke and Assistant Secretary Strickling:

I am writing to express my unqualified support and enthusiasm for the **MassBroadband 123** application for Round 2 BTOP funding. While Massachusetts has many strong applications pending before you, this one is my top priority. Here's why.

The primary focus of **MassBroadband 123** is the people, businesses, schools and local institutions in 123 cities and towns in western Massachusetts. They have gone without Internet service for a long time. Unlike in eastern Massachusetts, communities in western Massachusetts face substantial gaps in broadband coverage. The small towns and rolling hills of the Pioneer Valley and the Berkshires – the very landscape that makes those areas such a

uniquely beautiful place – have posed significant hurdles to the expansion of high-speed Internet much in the same way they hampered rural electrification efforts in the last century. As a result, municipal police and fire departments are seriously handicapped in their efforts to protect the safety of our residents, community colleges are unable to connect to networks and use modern applications, and medical facilities are prevented from implementing essential health care technologies. I have heard countless stories of school children doing their homework in the backseat of the family car while parked outside the public library because that is the only "hot spot" for miles.

MassBroadband 123 would answer these needs. The network will consist of over a thousand miles of high strand-count fiber serving western and north central Massachusetts. The network will provide middle-mile backbone infrastructure from which last-mile service providers can serve households and businesses. It will also directly connect to over 1,350 community anchor institutions, including all of our community colleges in the region, over 200 educational institutions, and over 350 public safety entities. The network will serve an area with over one million citizens, including over 321,000 households and 32,500 businesses in state-designated Economic Target Areas. We believe we can accomplish this at a cost of \$42,430 per mile, well within the NTIA's parameters.

As Governor, I travel all over the state and am acutely aware of the unique strengths and weaknesses of each of our regional economies. Western Massachusetts has been disconnected from the robust knowledge economy in the eastern region of our state. This has had a negative impact on employment, income and population growth, and overall well-being. Our residents know and are concerned about that. Tourism, a vital part of the region's economy, is affected by the inability of attractions to manage bookings online. The creative economy is impaired by inadequate or non-existent bandwidth for designers. Clean tech companies are reluctant to grow in the region because of limits on data research. Even farmers are affected by limited access to modern pest control information. Access to high speed Internet service is the issue I hear most about in western Massachusetts.

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That's why we started working to address this deficiency long before the BTOP program was created. In August 2008, I signed the Massachusetts Broadband Act, legislation that I introduced shortly after being elected Governor. Its objective is to extend affordable, high-speed Internet access to all homes, businesses, schools, libraries, medical facilities, government offices, and other public places across the Commonwealth, with a priority to address the dire needs of our unserved and underserved communities in western Massachusetts. Through that Act and other sources, we have committed \$26.2 million to **MassBroadband 123**. We are prepared to invest state funds to leverage vital BTOP funding as well as any private funding we may be able to secure.

Indeed, we have already started the work. Last summer we began installing fiber-optic cable along Interstate I-91. This project was cited in the National Broadband Plan as a model collaboration that should be emulated in other states. Our I-91 fiber deployment is near completion and is an important component of the **MassBroadband 123** network.

We need your help to finish the job. **MassBroadband 123** fully meets goals you seek to achieve around comprehensive community infrastructure under BTOP. Measured against the criteria outlined by the NTIA -- including the needs in the proposed service area(s), the credibility and sustainability of the project, the number of jobs to be created, the cost per job created, the number of community anchor institutions to be served, the cost per community anchor institution to be served, and the extent to which the projects would incentivize private investment -- **MassBroadband 123** is not just strong, but compelling. I hope we can count on you and your team for a prompt and favorable decision.

Thank you for your consideration. Please do let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,
