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Advancing Global Communications

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Internet Association

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March 3, 2017

The Honorable Jack Johnson, Chairman
The Honorable Mark Green, First Vice Chair
The Honorable Kerry Roberts, Second Vice Chair
Senate Commerce and Labor Committee
11 Legislative Plaza
Nashville, TN 37243

Dear Messrs. Johnson, Green, and Roberts:

We, the private-sector companies and associations listed below, urge you to pass SB 1058 and SB 1045. These bills would remove restrictions on municipal and cooperative broadband networks and public-private broadband partnerships. These restrictions have harmed both the public and private sectors by retarding or delaying economic growth, preventing the creation or retention of jobs around the State, particularly in rural areas, hampering workforce development, and diminishing the quality of life in Tennessee.

While the harm to Tennessee's communities that these restrictions have caused should be obvious, the injury to the private sector may not be. In fact, these restrictions hampered the private sector in multiple ways. They have interfered with the ability of private companies to make timely sales of equipment and services to public and cooperative broadband providers. They have interfered with the ability of private companies to use advanced municipal and cooperative networks to offer businesses and residential customers an endless array of modern products and services. They have also impaired the ability of private companies to enter into creative public-private partnerships that benefit all concerned. The restrictions have also thwarted economic and educational opportunities that contribute to a skilled workforce that would benefit existing and new businesses across the state.

The United States must compete in a global economy in which high capacity communications networks are playing an increasingly significant role. We need affordable access to advanced communications networks in as many communities as possible, as rapidly as possible, so that innovators can develop next-generation applications and services that will drive economic growth and global competitiveness. Unfortunately, in many communities in Tennessee and across America, particularly in rural areas, the current communications service providers are unable or unwilling to invest in advanced communications networks rapidly enough to enable the communities to stay abreast of their peers elsewhere in America and around the world. Communities should be free of artificial barriers to be able to do their part to help bring affordable high-capacity broadband connectivity to all Americans and to advance America's global competitiveness.

Municipalities and electric cooperatives in Tennessee are eager to work with willing established carriers, enter into public-private partnerships with new entrants, develop their own networks, if necessary, or create other innovative means of acquiring affordable access to advanced communications capabilities. These are fundamentally local decisions that should be made by the communities and cooperatives themselves, through the processes that their leaders ordinarily use for making comparable decisions. They should also be able to use their own resources as they deem appropriate to foster economic development, educational opportunity, public safety, and much more, without having to comply with the bottlenecks that current Tennessee law imposes.

We support strong, fair, and open competition to ensure that users can enjoy the widest range of choices and opportunities. Passage of SB 1058 and SB 1045 would be a step in the right direction. It would be good for Tennessee communities, particularly rural communities, good for the private sector, particularly high-technology companies, and good for America's global competitiveness. **Please pass SB 1058 and 1045.**

Sincerely,

Atlantic Engineering
Coalition for Local Internet Choice
CTC Energy & Technology
Fiber to the Home Council
Google
Indeed
Internet Association
National Association of Telecommunications
Officers and Advisors
Netflix
Next Century Cities
Nokia
OnTrac
Telecommunications Industry Association
Ting Internet
Utilities Technology Council

cc: Members of the Senate Commerce and Labor Committee
The Honorable Senator Janice Bowling