 Monadnock Broadband Group

May 7, 2021

Kenneth Weyler, Chairman
Finance Committee
NH House of Representatives
HouseFinanceCommittee@leg.state.nh.us

RE: SB 85

Dear Chairman Weyler and Members of the House Finance Committee:

Please accept this correspondence relative to SB 85. The Program as described in the bill is important to facilitate efforts to address broadband connectivity in New Hampshire, particularly in rural communities. The Monadnock Region lags behind many other areas with regard to internet broadband connectivity in the State. For this reason, and in the absence of other options, many of the Region’s communities have opted to utilize broadband infrastructure bonds to match provider contributions to construct modern fiber optic networks: one in 2019, five in 2020, and as many as fourteen in 2021. Since its introduction, the Monadnock Broadband Group has followed SB 85 and offers the following comments for your consideration.

1. Proactive communities in the Monadnock Region of NH intend to take on over $10 million in long term debt as early as July 2021 for activities that are aligned with the purpose of the Program enabled through the bill. Can the Program benefit these projects?

2. Last year’s Connecting NH Emergency Broadband Expansion Program provided insufficient timeline for buildout for many potential projects. It would be helpful if the bill spoke to the need for sufficient time to design and build effective broadband solutions in any forthcoming funding program.

3. As currently worded, the bill imposes a limit on broadband speeds “up to and including gigabit service”. We feel this is shortsighted. If we are going to invest in broadband infrastructure over the long term, we should do so in a way which will take us well into the future. Rather than imposing a maximum speed, consider a minimum so that funds awarded through the Program would be dramatically greater than the Federal Communication Commission definition of broadband (currently 25-megabit download, 3-megabit upload).

4. In the findings and purpose section of the bill, “access” is highlighted as a priority yet the proposed Program focuses on infrastructure. Although infrastructure is essential to access, it is also appropriate to recognize and consider that access to affordable broadband service (monthly service fees), devices and instructional resources will play an important role in the effectiveness of infrastructure improvements.

We offer the above based on our experiences and understanding in attempts to add value as you consider SB 85.

Respectfully,

Monadnock Broadband Group

The Monadnock Broadband Group is an informal coalition of municipal officials, practitioners and other stakeholders with interest in understanding and coordinating relative to broadband issues in Southwest NH. Staff support for Monadnock Broadband Group is provided by Southwest Region Planning Commission. For more information, contact Henry Underwood at hunderwood@swrpc.org or (603) 357-0557.