Senator [name]

Address

Representative [name]

Address

December 7, 2015

Dear Senator [name] and Representative [name]:

I am writing to you in dismay after recent scurrilous accusations made by the Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI) about our regional broadband cooperative, WiredWest. This well orchestrated PR attack by MBI not only contained misleading information and lacked proof of their claims, but also serves as yet another unnecessary MBI-instigated obstruction for this already inexcusably delayed project.

By contrast, instead of political posturing, WiredWest has consistently initiated work needed to bring to fruition a last mile network worthy of our communities. The Coop has developed, and distributed exceptionally detailed, credibly-vetted business plan information among our member towns and local elected officials; made every attempt to work cooperatively with MBI while upholding our towns’ best interests; and continually completed tasks that have legitimately moved the project forward – from directing 43 towns in creating Municipal Lighting Plants to financial modeling to GIS mapping to market and economic research studies, cost estimates and high level engineering to signing up over 7,000 subscribers, to getting 24 towns and $38 million of local bond authorizations passed, to creating locally- and expert-reviewed documentation such as a business plan and operating agreement. From the beginning, these tasks have focused on building a regional organization capable of operating a complex telecommunications enterprise that fulfills the WiredWest longtime stated mission of “*planning, building and operating a community-owned fiber-optic network*”.

WiredWest’s business plan and financial model have not only been created through a collaborative process with local officials and municipal fiber management experts, but it has recently been vetted and tweaked by the top municipal fiber network consultancy in the nation.

The MBI has not made good faith efforts to work collaboratively with WiredWest and its member communities. MBI has unilaterally dictated terms for the project, despite our cash-strapped towns providing 2/3rds of the funding. MBI required the project to use their cost estimates, which were 20% higher than three other estimates; and they announced they would contract the network, despite a record of cost overruns and significant value engineering on the MBI123 network, and lack of precedent in state/local projects where there is a majority of local funding, but no local management. And most disconcerting, this has set up a liability structure where our towns are financially responsible for all cost overruns that may result from MBI network design and construction management, while MBI has resisted local oversight mechanisms or inclusion in the design process to ensure capital and operational cost efficiencies.

Additionally, two pieces of legislation enacted in 2014, designed to provide more input from Western Mass broadband stakeholders in key decisions, have been completely ignored by MBI. First was in Acts of 2014, Chapter 287: An Act Promoting Economic Growth in the Commonwealth. Section 110 required the creation of a commission to “study any barriers and hindrances to the "last mile" connections to the broadband internet initiatives,” with findings to be presented no later than January 15, 2015.

Additionally, under Acts of 2014, Chapter 198: An Act Relative to the Massachusetts Broadband Institute, the MBI was to convene a working group to provide advice and feedback on the competitive process to be created by the corporation for providing grants. The working group was to consist of parties interested in, and eligible for the grants, (i.e., WiredWest), and the first meeting of the working group was to be convened by MBI not later than 90 days after the effective date of the legislation.

The MBI did not act in compliance with the legislation, and neither group was convened. I would appreciate knowing why, especially as the determinations of the latter working group would have impacted MBI’s last mile policy, which was developed and passed by MBI last July, without any input from WiredWest or its member communities, and which resulted in a clause that could be interpreted to preclude a model that is structured to provide traditional cooperative collective ownership and as such, imbues regional cost efficiencies to the project. Neither the exclusionary process, nor the resulting policy is acceptable to those of us that have to live with, and be financially responsible for the impacts of said policy.

Our communities are weary of MBI’s continued obstructionism and masquerading of interest in controlling the project and ensuring an unfettered flow of town funds to MBI, as concern for the welfare of the towns. As many of our towns prepare to sign our Community Compact with Governor Baker and Lieutenant Governor Polito later this month, a document that highlights regionalization, we find it ironic that MBI is choosing to hijack grant funding due to our desire to regionalize. Regionalization is the only viable option for our geographically expansive community of 800 residents and by far the most cost-effective and administratively savvy mechanism for a town with limited capacity. MBI’s regional-in-name-only solution prohibits a traditional Cooperative ownership structure, thereby negating the critical financial operation cost savings of acting regionally.

And if the above arguments aren’t enough, please recall that our towns have voted repeatedly for WiredWest. Through letters and resolutions sent to MBI, with our wallets via 7,000 pre-subscriptions, and at the ballot box – we have made an informed choice, and it’s WiredWest. We are asking you, as our elected representative at the State House, to ensure the expressed will of our region is honored and that this project moves forward under a spirit of true collaboration between MBI and WiredWest – and with all due haste.

Regards,