To the Senators and Representatives of the Iowa General Assembly:

The signatories to this letter oppose any state policy in Iowa that would impose any significant impediment to any city, county or state entity from providing broadband services to their citizens. We call on the state legislators of Iowa to reject such policies as harmful to the interests of the people of Iowa. That state has already imposed sufficient requirements on public telecommunications to ensure that citizens are well served by local government. There is no need for further legislation. The millions of dollars saved and the lives enriched by the 27 municipal communications systems currently operating in Iowa are testament to the health of the current system.

The President, the Congress, and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) have all identified the availability of competitive, affordable high-speed internet broadband access for all Americans as a national priority. The President has set an aggressive goal of 2007 for universal access in the United States. Without the contributions of local governments, it is doubtful that we will achieve universal deployment at all, let alone in two years. Iowa’s communities are leading the way, drawing upon a strong heritage of public utilities, technological ingenuity, and citizens committed to local development.

Broadband access has become increasingly essential to economic growth, healthcare, and education. What electric power and telephones were to the 20th Century, broadband access will be to the 21st. Towns that don't have affordable broadband lose jobs. Their children suffer a serious disadvantage in college or in the workforce, where fluency with computers and the internet is increasingly mandatory. Rural towns without broadband cannot take advantage of new breakthroughs in tele-medicine, online learning, or the economic opportunities created by telecommuting.

Municipalities have a valuable role to play in filling this gap in Iowa. Municipalities have a long history in our state of providing necessary services for citizens and stimulating local businesses. In the 20th century, municipalities built power plants and telephone lines when private services did not move fast enough. Our competitive power and telecom industries today demonstrate that these services by municipalities complement private industry rather than compete with it. In addition, municipalities have a long history of spending money to benefit their citizens by encouraging economic development and social opportunity. Municipalities across the country have invested public money in convention centers, health clinics, and community colleges not to make money, but to bring business opportunities, healthcare, and education to their citizens. They should have the same opportunity to offer public broadband access.

Opponents of municipal broadband have raised the strawman argument of governments monopolizing broadband or discriminating against competing private networks. Every signatory to this letter agrees that federal, state and local policies should encourage deployment of broadband networks in a competitive and technologically neutral manner. The reality has been that local governments only spend money to build systems when they believe a need exists, and that these local systems encourage private companies to deploy and invest in competitive systems. They also assist in the cultivation of technologies through educational institutions in Iowa.

In conclusion, the question of municipal broadband is one that affects us all as a nation. In the last five years, the United States has fallen from an international leader in broadband to 13th among industrialized nations. Many of the countries that are now ahead of us - Canada, Japan, Korea - have used municipal
systems as one important element in their broadband strategy. As a nation, we cannot afford to cut off any successful strategy if we want to remain internationally competitive. Nor should any state stand in the way of local governments serving the needs of local citizens.

Sincerely,