For Immediate Release

June 23, 2005

Contacts: Jim Baller, 202-833-5300 or
See list below by participating group

COMMUNITY BROADBAND COALITION NEWS RELEASE

Broad-Based Groups Band Together to Support Community Broadband Choices

Washington, DC—For the first time, groups representing local governments, the high tech industry, and consumer organizations have banded together to promote community broadband choices and the right of communities to provide broadband internet services to their citizens. In a letter sent to Capitol Hill today, the groups urged Members of Congress to support legislation that will ensure that local governments are not prevented from providing broadband networks to their residents and businesses.

The groups -- which collectively represent hundreds of high tech companies, thousands of cities and counties, and numerous consumer groups -- share a common commitment to extend the reach of broadband services throughout the country. Referring to President Bush’s priority to have universal affordable access to broadband technology by 2007, the letter states, “We believe that community broadband networks provide an essential catalyst for market competition, economic development, and universal, affordable Internet access for all Americans.”

“Without universal access to broadband, our nation’s children will continue to fall behind in the technological literacy so essential to our future. Empowering local government will also benefit rural and high-cost areas and will speed deployment throughout the country, lessening the gap between the United States and other nations,” the letter states.

The coalition of more than 40 local, state and national organizations is working to promote community broadband choices. Across the country, municipalities—often in direct partnership with the private sector—are entering the broadband field in response to the growing demand for broadband access to the internet. In Brooklyn, NY, for example, small businesses have had difficulty obtaining reasonably priced broadband services. Service to many rural areas has also been painfully slow. When private companies offer their services only in areas where there is a high concentration of potential customers, or if they are not providing sufficiently robust bandwidth capacity, municipalities should be able to step in and offer these services. Additionally, cities and towns should also be able to offer free or low-cost broadband services where the private sector has failed to make these services affordable to all residents and businesses.

“Community broadband is not incompatible with private sector competition,” the letter states. In comparing the current effort to ensure internet service in the 21st century with 19th century efforts to bring electricity to rural areas, the letter finds that “the choice should continue to be
made by local leaders who are directly accountable to their communities, using open and competitively neutral processes, and should not be foreclosed by state or federal law.”

Members of the coalition have been working to oppose efforts by states to restrict municipal governments from offering broadband to their constituents. Already, 13 states have adopted restrictions on future public broadband projects. Regardless of whether broadband is included in the congressional effort to reauthorize the Communications Act or in separate legislation, the coalition wants to ensure that municipalities retain a free hand in the process.

Groups and companies signing on to the letter (including media contacts, where available) include:

American Association of Law Libraries
American Electronics Association (AeA)
American Public Power Association, Desmarie Waterhouse, 202-467-2900
Association of Research Libraries
Association for Communications Technology Professionals in Higher Education
Champaign Urbana Wireless Network
EDUCAUSE
Eyapaha Institute
Fiber to the Home Council, Joe Savage, 503-635-3114
Free Press, Ben Scott, 202-265-1490, bscott@freepress.net
Information Technology Association of America
Internet2
Intertribal Entertainment
League of California Cities
MIGIZI Communications
The Media Access Project, Harold Feld, 202-454-5684, hfled@mediaaccess.org
National American Indian Development Corporation
National Association of Telecommunications Officers and Advisors, Libby Beaty, 703-519-8035
National Association of Counties
National League of Cities, Sherry Conway Appel, 202-626-3003, appel@nlc.org
Native American Public Telecommunications
Native Airspace
Native Laboratories
Native Media and Technology Network
Native Networking Policy Center
One Economy
Power Line Communications Association
Public Knowledge
Public Technology Institute
Red Crow Creations
Consumers Union, publisher of *Consumer Reports*, issued a similar letter of support today. Contact, Matthew Hartwig, 202-462-6262

####