The Honorable (Senator or Representative)
Tennessee General Assembly
Nashville, TN 37243

Dear (Senator or Representative):

The signatories to this letter oppose any state policy in Tennessee that would impose any significant impediment to any city, county, or state entity from providing broadband services to its citizens. We call on the members of the Tennessee General Assembly to reject such policies as harmful to the interests of the people of Tennessee.

The president, 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. Tennessee communities can lead the way, drawing on a strong heritage of independent communities, technological ingenuity, and citizens committed to local development.

Broadband access has become increasingly essential to economic growth, health care, 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 telemedicine, online learning, or the economic opportunities created by telecommuting.

Municipalities have a valuable role to play in filling this gap in Tennessee. 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, health care, 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 Tennessee.
The question of municipal broadband is one that affects us all as a nation. In the past 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, and 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,