# WISCONSIN LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

## RURAL BROADBAND

Room 412 East
State Capitol

September 7, 2016
10:00 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.

[The following is a summary of the September 7, 2016 meeting of the Study Committee on Rural Broadband. The file copy of this summary has appended to it a copy of each document prepared for or submitted to the committee during the meeting. A digital recording of the meeting is available on our Web site at **http://www.legis.wisconsin.gov/lc.**]

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### Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Marklein called the committee to order. The roll was called and a quorum was determined to be present.

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| COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: | Sen. Howard Marklein, Chair; Rep. Warren Petryk, Vice Chair; Reps. Beth Meyers and Mark Spreitzer; and Public Members Scott Behn, Ronald Brisbois, Philip Hejtmanek, Mike Hill, Michelle Olson, Jean Pauk, Ben Rivard, and Kelly Shipley. |
| COMMITTEE MEMBER EXCUSED: | Public Member Jim Costello. |
| COUNCIL STAFF PRESENT: | Zach Ramirez and Julia Norsetter, Staff Attorneys, and Larry Konopacki, Principal Attorney. |
| APPEARANCES: | Matthew Stanford, General Counsel; Kevin Groskreutz, Chief Information Officer - Ancillary Systems, Western Wisconsin Division, Hospital Sisters Health System; and David Mortimer, Director, Innovation Institute, Hospital Sisters of St. Francis Foundation, Hospital Sisters Health System, Wisconsin Hospital Association; Roger Luce, Executive Director, Oneida County Economic Development Corporation; Dave Noel, Chair, Oneida County Broadband Committee; Paul Osterman, Co-Founder, Northwoods Connect; and Maria Alvarez-Stroud, Director, University of Wisconsin (UW)-Extension Broadband & E-Commerce Education Center; and Will Andresen, UW-Extension Community Resource Development Educator for Iron County. |

Chair Marklein welcomed committee members to the second meeting. He described possible next steps for the committee, including discussion of legislative options and drafting legislation for the committee to consider. He said that committee discussion would include Broadband Expansion Grant Program viability, eligibility requirements, eligible locations, eligible activities, priority factors, funding, and planning support to local communities.

## Presentation by Wisconsin Hospital Association

**Matthew Stanford, General Counsel, Wisconsin Hospital Association**, remarked on the effect of broadband infrastructure on access to health care, such as physician recruitment and retention, reducing problems caused by the proximity of a clinic, and increasing the availability of electronic visits. He then made recommendations to the committee including suggesting that a criterion could be added to the Broadband Expansion Grant evaluation criteria requiring the Public Service Commission (PSC) to consider whether a proposed project impacts medically underserved populations.

**Kevin Groskreutz, Chief Information Officer, Ancillary Systems, Western Wisconsin Division, Hospital Sisters Health System (HSHS) and David Mortimer, Director, Innovation Institute, Hospital Sisters of St. Francis Foundation, HSHS**, talked about the decision of HSHS to participate in the grant application process and how receiving grant funding positively impacted rural health in the community. They described how the grant allowed them to build broadband infrastructure to address the problem of a "rural penalty" in health care access, which can be caused by factors such as lack of access to specialists, and the "distance decay effect," whereby a patient who lives far away from a clinic may find it difficult to follow-up on a doctor's recommendations, such as obtaining a prescription.

## Panel Presentation: An Experience With the Broadband
## Expansion Grant Program

**Roger Luce, Executive Director, Oneida County Economic Development Corporation, Dave Noel, Chair, Oneida County Broadband Committee, and Paul Osterman, Co-Founder, Northwoods Connect**, discussed their experience bringing wireless broadband service to rural areas in Oneida County. They talked about the steps they took to develop a county-wide broadband implementation plan, such as identifying providers and determining the scope of expansion options in the county. They also talked about their experience with the PSC grant process, including the challenges in obtaining matching funds in rural areas. The presenters also described the merits of different wireless technologies used in current broadband projects and questioned the current definition of scalability used by the PSC as it relates to wireless technologies. Finally, they discussed the challenges of building broadband infrastructure in areas of the state with geographic obstacles such as lakes and heavily forested areas.

## Presentation: Bringing Broadband to Iron County

**Maria Alvarez-Stroud, Director, University of Wisconsin (UW)-Extension Broadband & E-Commerce Education Center** and **Will Andresen, UW-Extension Community Resource Development Educator for Iron County**, discussed UW-Extension's work on broadband education and outreach through grant-writing workshops and boot camps that have been held in various locations throughout the state. They commented on the locations and number of attendees at the outreach programming and their goal of providing information to rural communities regarding available broadband resources. They commented that to create a broadband initiative, local communities may need a leader, matching funds, and education regarding the importance of broadband. By way of example, the presenters discussed the process of bringing broadband to portions of Iron County, including forming and educating a broadband coalition, connecting with local providers, acquiring local funding, and submitting a PSC grant application.

## Discussion of Committee Assignment

Following the day's presentations, Chair Marklein opened the floor for input from committee members. The committee discussed the seven items identified by the Chair at the beginning of the meeting. The committee commented on the continuation of the Broadband Expansion Grant Program and whether changes need to be made to the eligibility and priority factors. The committee also discussed the current funding of the grant program and whether and how to continue funding after the current fund is spent. The committee also discussed whether and how federal funding should be considered when determining which projects should receive grant funds. The Chair closed the committee by thanking the members for their time and input.

## Plans for Future Meetings

The committee previously planned to meet on October 5, and if necessary, on November 2 and December 14.

## Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 3:30 p.m.

JN:jal