

February 28, 2022



Governor Kathy Hochul  
State Capitol Building  
State St. and, Washington Ave  
Albany, New York, 12224

Dear Governor Hochul:

Over the past two decades, New York residents have learned of the decisive role that high-quality Internet plays in unlocking boundless education, healthcare, public safety, job creation, and economic opportunities. Reliable and affordable broadband can bring a world of information and promise within reach. Likewise, a lack thereof can have a generational impact on families and rippling effects on their communities.

With unprecedented funding available for broadband access and adoption, collaboration between state and local leadership is imperative. Tribal and local governments are uniquely positioned to seek on-the-ground solutions tailored to their community's needs. State support enables local leaders to make the best use of the myriad of resources available to help achieve ubiquitous connectivity.

By elevating residents' voices and fostering increased collaboration between state and local leaders, the Governor's Office could equip local officials with the key resources necessary for achieving their community's broadband ambitions. Congress' historic investment could provide the backbone for monumental state broadband strategies. We strongly encourage the inclusion of Tribal and local perspectives in New York's broadband and digital equity plans, ensuring maximum impact of this historic opportunity for decades into the future.

Next Century Cities supports community-based efforts to ensure that all residents have affordable, reliable, high-speed Internet access. We are a non-profit, nonpartisan organization born of the need to elevate community-level perspectives into broadband policymaking at every level of government.

Our organization is made up of more than 200 members in over 40 states, including Albany, Jamestown, Rochester, Saratoga Springs, Schenectady, and Syracuse. The mayors and other local officials in our network have demonstrated expertise in expanding digital infrastructure and developing broadband adoption programs. Many have confronted those challenges in their hometowns, even without state and federal support.

Municipalities understand the far-reaching consequences when residents lack broadband access or cannot afford the subscription price. As New York drafts a roadmap to spend the influx of federal resources, those plans must support local efforts to generate connectivity solutions for themselves, particularly in counties like Cattaraugus and Bronx, where there is little financial incentive for traditional providers to build infrastructure.



Incorporating local insights through transparent processes with staff dedicated to support ongoing collaboration could help the state meet the demands of a largely online workforce, increased telemedicine offerings, and schoolwork that requires a fast, resilient Internet connection. State tools that empower local participation can bring resource-strapped communities to the table to determine their path toward widespread connectivity.

Public-private partnerships, free WiFi connection points, and municipally managed infrastructure are only a handful of the innovative solutions that local governments have employed to ensure that every resident and business can access the wealth of benefits and essential services the Internet offers. Local leaders are also determined to paint a more granular picture of what service residents want and need, filling persistent information gaps.

Across New York, local governments are establishing inventive connectivity strategies. Counties like Chautauqua, Cattaraugus, Allegany, and Lewis have partnered with neighboring communities, investing collective resources in regional broadband projects designed to bring high-speed service within reach for residents and businesses.<sup>1</sup>

Local officials in communities like Rochester and Syracuse understand the impact that disconnectedness has on employment, health, and educational outcomes, as well as overall livelihood.<sup>2</sup> Leaders from sparsely populated towns like Coxsackie have a detailed understanding of unique deployment issues in rural communities that can inform statewide strategies.<sup>3</sup>

The State is distinctly positioned to bolster local access and adoption efforts, expanding initiatives' impact far beyond the strides that any single community can make on its own.

The need is expansive. The timeline is unforgiving. Local governments have made broadband equity a priority and will rely on ongoing partnerships with state leadership to effectuate lasting change.

Respectfully,

Next Century Cities

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<sup>1</sup> See Anthony Dolce, *Region Makes A Push For Rural Broadband* (April 12, 2021), <https://bit.ly/3Ikbo3P>; Julie Abbass, *Broadband grant by Northern Border Regional Commission to bring broadband to Denmark area* (Aug. 10, 2021), <https://bit.ly/3vwaRs7>.

<sup>2</sup> See Francella Ochillo, *Supporting Low-Income Access and Adoption in New York Will Have a Compound Effect In The Communities They Call Home* (April 29, 2021), <https://bit.ly/3peNY8r>; Next Century Cities, *Local Leaders Discuss How New York's Broadband Commission Could Bring Connectivity Within Reach for Unserved and Underserved Populations* (Aug. 4, 2020), <https://bit.ly/3srvNP3>.

<sup>3</sup> See *Local Leaders Discuss How New York's Broadband Commission Could Bring Connectivity Within Reach for Unserved and Underserved Populations*.