

Good morning. On behalf of the primary sponsors of the bill, Rep. Sibilio and Rep. Hill, and the 41 tripartisan cosponsors, thank you for inviting me to testify on H. 680 today.

As long as there has been an internet, and as long as it has been commodified, one thing stayed constant: that equal access to the social, informational, economic and educational power of the internet is critical to what we consider freedom. The government created the internet, and its baseline has been that the providers that have learned to commodify the internet must retain net neutrality — the idea that no company can throttle access to websites, that the internet is indeed a utility, and should be regulated at the highest levels in that way.

And here in Vermont, as we struggle to bring broadband service to the last mile, especially in the most rural areas of the state, that promise of neutrality was one of the few things that kept a level of hope alive as these rural areas tried to lift themselves up economically with the technology that was available in our cities, and in our largest towns. Without net neutrality, these parts of the state will be left further behind, and the promises we made — and those the internet made — will be made empty.

Who uses the internet today? Everyone. Governments are run on the net, businesses large and small are run on the net, schools and universities are run on the net, art is created and disseminated on the net, revolutions are fought on the net and the online marketplace is run on the net. And it is already not free. It has become the spine of our economic growth and equal access to it is our guiding principle, and Americans — Vermonters — pay a substantial fee to providers every month for that access. And that access is essential.

The FCC changed the rules, and removed net neutrality, allowing service providers the option to limit access as we know it. Large providers, sensing that the public relations fallout would be damaging, have let us know that they have

no plans to alter our access to the internet, or to charge more for better access to some sites. As much as I appreciate their efforts to assure us of their honest motivations, I liked the world better in the days when net neutrality was the rule, and the one small, final barrier to a complete privatization of the internet. It is the role of the government to make sure this balance is achieved.

H.680 is our attempt to relevel the playing field. It is a consumer protection bill, and sets net neutrality standards applicable to internet service providers in Vermont, which we believe are enforceable under Vermont's Consumer Protection Act.

We believe that equal and unfettered internet access is essential for supporting economic and educational opportunities, strengthening health and public safety networks and reinforcing freedom of expression and democratic, social and civic engagement.

We believe the state of Vermont has a right to protect its consumers from potentially unfair and anticompetitive business practices, and that unfettered access far outweighs the benefits of allowing service providers to manipulate internet traffic solely for their own gain.

And we believe that to avoid disadvantaging Vermonters, the FCC must follow its own recent rulings and maintain strong, clear rules against blocking, throttling, and paid prioritization. Anything less would be a direct threat to our culture, our economy and the equity that sustains us all.

Thank you for giving H.680 a hearing this morning. I am going to let Legislative Council take you through the findings that we believe argue against federal pre-emption, and the proposed statute. There is plenty to consider in this bill, but I think this committee understands better than most how important this bill is,

and how important it is to let Vermonters know that we are protecting their right to net neutrality in this state.