



STATE OF VERMONT
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

May 9, 2024

Christine Hallquist
Executive Director
Vermont Community Broadband Board
Public Utilities Commission
112 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05620-2601

Dear Executive Director Hallquist,

The House Corrections and Institutions Committee recently heard testimony from the Vermont Department of Corrections regarding their request for your support in using available federal funding to install Wi-Fi across Vermont's six correctional facilities.

The State is well-positioned to bridge this infrastructural gap given its comprehensive Wi-Fi mapping of all correctional facilities in 2022. The last remaining hurdle continues to be the requisite funding for this critical investment.

These discussions follow President Biden's signing of the 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, which dedicated \$65 billion to broadening access to affordable high-speed broadband for all Americans. This federal legislation explicitly identified incarcerated individuals as a covered population in its focus on digital equity.

At the same time, Vermont's Digital Equity Plan also names incarcerated individuals in state custody as a key underserved population. The Plan states that *"Connecting currently incarcerated individuals with virtual education and training opportunities has the potential to accelerate self-improvement and improve their opportunities once released, reducing rates of recidivism."*

This language echoes testimony provided to our Committee by the Community College of Vermont (CCV) regarding the current impact of a lack of Wi-Fi within correctional facilities and the potential benefits of investing in this digital infrastructure. CCV – which operates a corrections community college program supported by a \$4.5 million federal grant secured by Senator Bernie Sanders – testified it cannot realize the full potential of its programming for incarcerated individuals without Wi-Fi across Vermont's six correctional facilities.

The Committee agrees with CCV and the Department in their assessment that federal funding for this initiative would support the following key objectives:

- Expanded educational and vocational programming, with an emphasis on rehabilitation and Vermont workforce development
- Increased staff access to technology to facilitate the modernization of Vermont's correctional workplaces
- Enhanced focus on equity that connects incarcerated individuals with resources (vocational, technical, educational) that mirror those in Vermont's communities

At a time when the Legislature is working hard to update our correctional facilities to be more rehabilitative and focus on the successful re-entry of incarcerated individuals, our Committee appreciates VCBB's consideration of the Department's critical investment in digital infrastructure and equity, and we look forward to following up in the future.

Warm Regards,



Rep. Alice M. Emmons, Chair

Rep. Joseph "Chip" Troiano, Vice Chair



On behalf of House Corrections & Institutions:

Rep. Mary A. Morrissey, Ranking Member

Rep. John Arrison

Rep. Michelle Bos-Lun

Rep. Conor Casey

Rep. Gina Galfetti

Rep. Troy Headrick

Rep. Wayne Laroche

Rep. Eric Maguire

Rep. Tristan Roberts, Clerk