

Dear Chair Klevorn and Members of the House State and Local Government Committee:

We hope this letter finds you well and thriving. At the Saint Paul Neighborhood Network (SPNN), we are committed to serving our community, ensuring equitable access to digital resources, and fostering an environment where every voice can be heard. In this spirit, we discuss the critical importance of the Equal Access to Broadband Act and the proposed modernization of the funding structure for local community television, as outlined in HF 4182/SF4262.

The Equal Access to Broadband Act represents a significant step forward in our collective journey toward digital equity. By allowing local governments to negotiate franchise agreements for broadband providers to use public rights-of-way, this bill aims to ensure that all residents, regardless of their socio-economic status, have access to high-quality broadband services. This is not just about expanding infrastructure; it's about democratizing access to essential digital resources. In an era where digital connectivity is a cornerstone of personal growth and community development, ensuring equitable access to these resources is more critical than ever.

Moreover, the proposed legislation to modernize the funding structure for local community television is vital for organizations like SPNN. As you know, community television stations, including ours, rely on cable TV franchise fees and PEG fees to support a wide range of programming. This includes coverage of local government meetings, candidate and election programming, sports, news, education, health, community events, and much more. This programming has become increasingly essential, especially with the decline of local newspapers in many areas. However, as franchise fees are currently paid only on traditional cable TV service—which is on the decline—we face a significant challenge in maintaining our operations and serving our community's needs.

Franchising broadband will not only level the playing field but also ensure ongoing funding to continue serving our community's diverse needs. This is particularly important for SPNN, as equitable broadband access directly translates to enhanced community engagement, education, and empowerment. It opens avenues for cities to negotiate public benefits, including initiatives that further digital equity—a core mission of SPNN.

These bills are especially crucial for the BIPOC community, which often faces disproportionate challenges in accessing digital resources. By supporting these legislative efforts, we can help bridge the digital divide, ensuring that every resident, regardless of background, has equal opportunities to connect, learn, and grow. For SPNN, these bills are not just legislative actions; they are lifelines that can ensure our continued ability to serve and uplift every community member effectively.

These initiatives represent a future where digital equity and community media are not just ideals but realities. Supporting these bills is about committing to a future where every community member can thrive in an increasingly digital world. Please let us know if you need further

information or how we can assist in advancing these crucial pieces of legislation. Thank you for your work on behalf of our residents and our community. Together, we can make a difference.

Sincerely,

Xavier Vazquez
Executive Director
Saint Paul Neighborhood Network (SPNN)