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**SCHOOLS, HEALTH & LIBRARIES BROADBAND COALITION RELEASES
“CONNECTING ANCHOR INSTITUTIONS: A BROADBAND ACTION PLAN”**

**Policy Recommendations Designed to Help Federal, State and Local Policy Makers
Grow2Gig+**

WASHINGTON D.C. (Wednesday, July 13th, 2016) -- Connecting our nation’s schools, libraries, health clinics and other community anchor institutions (CAIs) to next generation high-speed broadband is an important national priority. In an effort to provide federal, state and local leaders with policy options to ensure that all anchor institutions have high-speed connections to the Internet, the SHLB Coalition today is releasing **“Connecting Anchor Institutions: A Broadband Action Plan.”**

SHLB (The Schools, Health & Libraries Broadband Coalition) is the leading advocate for open, affordable, high-capacity broadband for our nation’s community anchor institutions and their communities. The recently launched **Grow2Gig+ Initiative** is a campaign designed to help bring gigabit speed-and-beyond networks to all anchor institutions in America by 2020.

“Anchor institutions are the lifeblood of our communities, and access to high-speed Internet at our nation’s anchor institutions is the first rung on the ladder to success,” said **John Windhausen, Jr., Executive Director of SHLB.** “The SHLB Action Plan gives policy makers a road map for designing a broadband strategy that promotes education, health care and community enrichment.”

The SHLB Action Plan is organized into ten policy papers that outline several paths to success, identifying problems and providing solutions that improve access, funding and infrastructure, so that all communities, urban and rural, rich and poor, can access more affordable, next generation broadband services.

The papers share three common themes: **Sharing**, such as aggregation and public-private partnerships that eliminate silos and reduce costs; **promoting competition** to incentivize growth and bring more affordable options; and, **funding strategies** that help communities meet up-front build-out and deployment costs, and ongoing monthly fees.

The SHLB Action Plan expands and integrates several of today's leading policy topics -- including dig once, spectrum allocation and the FCC's special access/business data service reform -- to illustrate how these policies can help improve education and lower health care costs.

To Read the Executive Summary and the Action Plan, [CLICK HERE](#).

SHLB released the papers today at an event in Washington D.C. held at the Alliance for Excellent Education featuring several of the papers' authors and industry leaders who gathered to discuss their recommendations.

"Anchor institutions are not just a key part of the solution to the broadband availability challenge, you are also key to the adoption challenge," said **Gigi Sohn, Counselor to FCC Chairman Wheeler**. Sohn challenged community leaders to step up in closing the digital divide. "Successful broadband adoption programs come from the bottom up, not the top down. You are trusted members of the community who know how best to serve residents most in need of the tools to get connected."

"One-third of American homes still do not subscribe to home broadband service, making daily life challenging," said **Angela Siefer, Director of the National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA)**. "Community anchors can provide digital literacy training, educate consumers about helpful programs, lead community digital inclusion planning efforts, and, in some cases, provide wireless broadband services directly to consumers. But for these efforts to succeed, policymakers must support community anchors and their partners with locally customized resources to meet the needs of specific populations."

The divide between rural and urban communities was also addressed.

"Anchor institutions in rural areas face the same challenges in high-speed access as rural Americans, where 39 percent lack adequate access to broadband service, compared to only 4 percent in urban areas," said **Tom Koutsky, Chief Policy Council at Connected Nation**. "In the absence of a sustainable business model for rural broadband deployment, policymakers should provide enhanced financial incentives to attract private sector investment. And those incentives should include interconnection and service obligations to ensure that recipients of government funding provide community anchors with high-capacity broadband."

Koutsky's paper recommends deployment strategies for anchor institutions like "dig once," installing empty conduit for competitive providers, permitting dark fiber use, standardizing lease agreements, implementing an asset inventory databases, wireless tower siting policies, and simplifying rights-of-way. "Streamlining access to government rights-of-way and effectively managing public land can expedite the deployment of high-capacity broadband to anchor institutions," Koutsky said.

Health clinics, public housing, and other social service centers provide a variety of critical non-profit services for communities on a fixed budget, and the high price of broadband service is often a deterrent to anchor institutions maximizing use of this vitally important technology.

“Aggregating the buying power of different types of community anchor institutions through statewide or regional procurement is a tested best practice that can enable anchor institutions to achieve lower per unit pricing, higher bandwidth, and better service quality,” said **Joanne Hovis, President of CTC Technology & Energy**. “Broadband policies and programs should promote, rather than limit, participation by non-profit and municipal broadband network providers. Non-profit providers often focus on long-term and community-based goals and can pass through cost savings to their CAI customers.”

More competition is also at the heart of the solution. John Windhausen praised FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler for his leadership on long delayed special access reform for the business data services market, saying it would help schools, community colleges, libraries and health clinics across the nation transition to the networks of the future.

“Competition breeds greater investment, more jobs, lower prices, and higher quality customer service. Yet many community anchors still only receive one or no responses after issuing a request for service. Policy-makers can promote competition by ensuring that broadband networks are open to interconnection, by reducing prices of wholesale services, and by promoting network sharing,” said **Windhausen**.

“Building open, middle mile networks to anchor institutions also promotes competition,” Windhausen said. “Networks built with open interconnection policies provide ‘jumping off’ points that allow competitive broadband providers to extend service to the surrounding residential and business community.

“Building on E-Rate success and competitive interconnection, anchor institutions can become broadband engines that help empower the entire community,” Windhausen added.

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