



SHLB

SCHOOLS, HEALTH & LIBRARIES
BROADBAND COALITION

Why We Need Affordable Broadband for Anchor Institutions and Communities

By John Windhausen, Jr.

Schools, healthcare providers, libraries and other anchor institutions are the gateway to the community. These non-profit and governmental organizations increasingly provide essential Internet services to students, patients, patrons and underprivileged people. But their ability to meet these community needs depends on being able to obtain affordable, high-capacity broadband connections that often do not exist, especially in rural and non-competitive markets.

The 2010 National Broadband Plan Goal #4 called for every community to have affordable gigabit level broadband to anchor institutions by the year 2020. While we have made significant progress in the last six years, there is much more work to be done to meet that goal.

The American Library Association reports 42% of libraries still have a broadband connection of less than 10 Mbps, which is just one percent of the capacity called for in the National Broadband Plan. Forty-one percent of schools do not meet the short-term connectivity goals established by the FCC, leaving 21 million schoolchildren without adequate broadband connectivity to engage in online learning. Health providers outside of urban areas are 34% less likely to have a 50 Mbps connection than their urban counterparts.

The Schools, Health & Libraries Broadband Coalition (SHLB Coalition) will be releasing an important Broadband Action Plan for Community Anchor Institutions on Wednesday, July 13. One of the most important recommendations of this Action Plan is the need to rein in the prices for special access services, also called “business data services.” The market for business data services is distorted by the dominance of one or two companies. Our schools, libraries and health care facilities purchase access to the pipelines that transmit all broadband traffic and unfortunately for all of us, these pipelines are controlled by a very few broadband gatekeepers. In fact, according to data collected by

the FCC, 97% of the high-capacity broadband market is controlled by one or two providers. That means that every interaction — a Skype lecture in the classroom, a tablet using the library’s Wi-Fi, a desktop terminal at the nurse’s station — will at some point travel over pipelines owned by just a few companies who do not compete with one another.

The symptoms of this distorted marketplace are acutely felt by the institutions who need these services most. With declining budgets, our institutions face higher prices for broadband access. The monopoly or duopoly control of the high-capacity broadband marketplace makes it almost impossible for most companies to provide competitive prices to the institutions that need it most.

In April, the FCC voted to move forward with a plan to curb these anticompetitive practices. We applaud Chairman Tom Wheeler’s proposal to seek a technology neutral approach to address this distorted market and restore competition that will result in more network build-outs, more affordable prices and faster speeds for our schools, libraries and health care institutions.

Communities are clamoring for better, faster, more affordable broadband to support their public institutions. As we’ll outline in our Grow2Gig+ Action Plan, we believe addressing a lack of competition in business data services is an important step forward.

We have the opportunity to dramatically improve teaching and learning, to offer equal and ubiquitous access to broadband for our communities and begin to reach goals we have set for ourselves. We just need the FCC’s help.

Source: [Bloomberg Government](#)

About SHLB:

The SHLB Coalition is a non-profit, 501(c)(3) advocacy organization that supports open, affordable, high-capacity broadband connections for anchor institutions and their surrounding communities. The SHLB Coalition is based in Washington, DC and has a diverse membership of commercial and non-commercial organizations from across the United States. To learn more, visit www.shlb.org.