



Legislative Testimony
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**Written Testimony Supporting
House Bill 5260, An Act Requiring State Contractors
to Adopt a Net Neutrality Policy**

Senator McLachlan, Senator Flexer, Representative Fox, and distinguished members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee:

My name is Kaley Lentini, and I am legislative counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut (ACLU-CT). I am here to testify in support of House Bill 5260, An Act Requiring State Contractors to Adopt a Net Neutrality Policy.

The ACLU-CT believes in defending free speech and protecting First Amendment rights. The free flow of information and the ability to communicate freely are key to America's democracy. The Internet is central to how Connecticut residents and Americans everywhere express their opinions, share their knowledge, and learn from one another. It is also how many people learn about and debate important policies, organize themselves around issues, and evaluate candidates for office. Equal access to that information is imperative for everyone to participate in our democracy.

However, the Federal Communications Commission's December 2017 decision to repeal network neutrality principles for Internet service providers threatens people's ability to participate in democracy via the Internet. Without network neutrality, Internet service companies can determine which content we can see, how quickly we can access it, and how much we pay for it.

In the absence of net neutrality previously, we have seen Verizon block text messages from NARAL, a reproductive rights advocacy organization, because the company determined the texts were "controversial." Canadian Telecom company Telus blocked a union website because it was in a labor dispute with the union, AT&T limited the use of FaceTime to coerce customers to purchase more expensive data plans, multiple providers blocked mobile wallet applications that compete with their own, and others engaged in unfair blocking and slowing of content.

Without federal protections, states can and must take action to protect net neutrality and shield their residents from unfair and unjust practices. Though the FCC claims that state net neutrality laws are preempted, as of yet, there is no consensus among legal experts on whether state efforts are preempted by the absence of FCC rules. In fact, over half of the states in the country are making attempts to preserve net neutrality. With the Washington legislature passing net neutrality legislation, 26 state legislatures introducing such legislation, and five governors enacting executive orders to protect net neutrality, passing net neutrality legislation in Connecticut would bring our state in line with the majority of the country.

Throughout the country, business owners have spoken out about the negative effect that a more unequal internet would have on their companies. Advocates for a wide range of causes have weighed in to warn about the potential harms of allowing Internet companies to block, slow down, or charge more for content with which those companies disagree. Educators have expressed concerns about the need for an open and equal Internet in order to ensure that students and classrooms have the information they need. Healthcare experts have noted the importance of net neutrality for ensuring electronic access to health records and access to telemedicine. Clergy have discussed the importance of an open Internet for providing information to their congregations. And many groups have discussed the particular importance of net neutrality for rural communities, people of color, and low-income people.

This bill would protect the freedom of the Internet for the people of Connecticut and send a message to the FCC and the nation that Connecticut cares about free speech and equal access to information. The ACLU-CT encourages this committee to support this bill to preserve net neutrality.