



Romaine Quinn

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 75th ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

AB 820

As both state interests and private companies such as Google seek to expand internet access, municipalities across the state are working hard to position themselves to reap the benefits that these projects bring. Knowing that strong broadband access brings increased economic opportunity, encourages new residents to move in, brings stronger health care infrastructure; our state's cities, towns, villages, and counties are exploring ways to make themselves more attractive for potential future projects.

Working with stakeholders from the cable companies, broadband providers, towns, municipalities, and the Public Service Commission, we have crafted legislation to create Broadband Forward! communities. The Broadband Forward! designation will be registered with the PSC and act as a sort of "gold star" behind a community's name, indicating that it has enacted laws that ensure broadband projects move forward quickly, efficiently, and with a minimum amount of red tape.

The standards laid out in this bill create common-sense streamlining to get communities onto the same page. The requirements are:

1. Appointing a single point of contact for all matters related to a broadband network project.
2. Requiring the political subdivision to determine whether an application is complete and notifying the applicant about the determination in writing within 10 days of receiving the application.
3. If the political subdivision does not believe that an application is complete, requiring the written notification to specify in detail the required information that is incomplete.
4. If the political subdivision does not make the written notification, requiring the political subdivision to consider an application to be complete.
5. Allowing an applicant to resubmit an application as often as necessary until the application is complete.
6. Within 45 days of receiving an application that is complete, requiring the political subdivision to approve or deny the application and provide the applicant written notification of the approval or denial. Note: after discussions with towns and municipalities, our amendment extends this time period to 60 days.
7. If the political subdivision denies an application, requiring the political subdivision to include in the written notification that supports that the denial is not arbitrary or capricious. Note: this is also amended language, replacing a stricter, "substantial evidence" requirement.

8. Requiring that an application is considered approved and any required permit is issued if the political subdivision does not provide the written notification.
9. Providing that any fee imposed by the political subdivision to review an application, issue a permit, or perform any other activity related to a broadband network project is reasonable.
10. Allowing all forms, applications, and documentation related to a broadband network project to be filed and signed by electronic or another means authorized by the commission.

Under this bill, PSC will create a model ordinance that can be passed by the political entity seeking to become a Broadband Forward! community, or the community can pass its own legislation and attach a legal memo detailing how they meet the criteria discussed above.

This status will serve as a spotlight to industry leaders who have the desire to expand their broadband projects, lighting up those communities that are ready and willing to act as strong partners to benefit their citizens. As this registry is created, industry will have an easy list of communities that are, essentially, "shovel ready" for broadband projects.

**ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON MINING AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT – PUBLIC HEARING
FEBRUARY 4, 2016**

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF AB 820—ANGIE DICKISON, WISCONSIN STATE BROADBAND DIRECTOR

Good morning, Chair Kulp and members of the Assembly Committee on Mining and Rural Development. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Assembly Bill 820 related to the duties of the Public Service Commission under the broadband expansion grant program and the certification of political subdivisions under that program.

My name is Angie Dickison, and I am the State Broadband Director. I am responsible for coordinating, managing, and monitoring the state's broadband availability and broadband adoption programs through the Commission's State Broadband Office, including broadband data collection and mapping. I serve as the first point-of-contact with key stakeholders on broadband issues, and work with providers and communities to develop broadband investment and adoption plans in coordination with other related state initiatives. I also work in collaboration with other Wisconsin state agencies and provide leadership in promoting wider adoption and use of broadband throughout Wisconsin.

The Public Service Commission supports Assembly Bill 820 because this legislation seeks to coordinate and streamline administrative procedures for the deployment of next generation broadband technologies. AB 820 provides a new designation of "Broadband Forward! Community" for units of local government who wish to participate. To be designated as a Broadband Forward! Community, a local government may opt in by complying with certain procedures for reviewing applications and permits related to broadband infrastructure projects. This designation provides communities with the opportunity to demonstrate their support for increased broadband access, with the hope that doing so will encourage greater private and public broadband investment.

If a community is already taking steps independently to address their broadband needs, there is no mandate to participate in this program. This legislation provides a simple, common-sense way to get more bang for Wisconsin's "broadband buck" by improving the speed and efficiency of broadband expansion.

AB 820 requires the State Broadband Office to serve as an information resource to encourage broadband development throughout the state and certify local communities as being “broadband ready”. Broadband Forward! Community certification sends a signal that a local unit of government has taken steps to reduce obstacles to broadband infrastructure investment. While this designation will not necessarily guarantee investment, it will provide a way for communities to voluntarily distinguish themselves and encourage economic growth by attracting broadband providers.

Over the last few years, broadband access has become a competitive necessity and a component of economic development. AB 820 adds economic development impacts of a broadband project to the criteria that the Commission may use to evaluate Broadband Expansion Grant applications.

Competition and investment among providers has pushed broadband access out to most of the population of the state. However, coverage gaps remain, primarily in the rural areas of Wisconsin. Now, Wisconsin, like most other states, is working to incentivize the expansion of broadband to the unserved and underserved areas.

To assist in the expansion of broadband in Wisconsin, Governor Walker created the Broadband Expansion Grant Program in the 2011-2013 biennial budget, with an allocation of \$500,000 per fiscal year. Last year, Governor Walker and the Legislature increased funding for broadband expansion grants in the 2015-2017 biennial budget to \$1.5 million annually; with a total of \$6 million allocated from the Universal Service Fund cash reserves, to fund grants over a 4 year period.

In addition to these significant and flexible public-private grants, 2016 marks year one of a six-year, \$570 million federal investment in rural broadband expansion in our state. Any improvement in the speed and efficiency of these investments, such as that provided by this bill, will make a significant difference in Wisconsin.

Expanding broadband is critical to growing Wisconsin’s rural communities. Broadband Forward! Community certification indicates that a local unit of government has taken steps to reduce hurdles to broadband infrastructure investment. With this in mind, the State Broadband Office at the Public Service Commission stands ready to serve as a resource to communities and providers looking to

maximize broadband infrastructure investments in Wisconsin—with the goal of bringing broadband service to every corner of our state.

Thank you again, Chair Kulp, for bringing needed attention to this critical issue. At this time, we're happy to answer any questions from committee members.
