

National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners

Resolution in Support of State-Based, Non-Profit Public Affairs Network

WHEREAS, It is essential for a representative democracy to foster robust communications and transparency of government proceedings in order to build greater confidence in government institutions and be true to the ideals of the citizens' democracy envisioned by our Founding Fathers; *and*

WHEREAS, In recent years it has become increasingly clear that robust civic engagement has been replaced by apathy and increasing distrust of all levels of government institutions among all ages of citizens, especially younger people; *and*

WHEREAS, State governments, including executive, legislative, judiciary, and independent regulatory agencies, are increasingly being asked to assume increased responsibilities with on-the-ground actions due to the recent dysfunction between federal executive and legislative branches; *and*

WHEREAS, It has become more vital than ever to encourage greater transparency in State government proceedings as a means to foster greater confidence by citizens in its State government institutions; *and*

WHEREAS, The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has recommended the development of State-based public affairs television networks to provide public access and increase government transparency through C-SPAN-style coverage of public government meetings in each of the fifty States; *and*

WHEREAS, Over one dozen States have already established State-based public affairs networks, many of which are organized on a non-profit basis, to fulfill the role of communicating complex public affairs issues to its citizens, originally focusing on broadcasting and cable TV networks, but recently radio and digital broadband networks as well; *and*

WHEREAS, Due to the rapid advances in digital technologies and the enhancements of high-speed broadband networks, the lines between traditional technology based regulatory "silos" have become increasingly blurred and less important; *and*

WHEREAS, The issue of increasing the "digital skills" of all citizens has become an increasingly significant public policy imperative as the technological capabilities increase the power to deliver high-speed digital data to consumers over a variety of media; *and*

WHEREAS, Innovative digital applications, such as e-government, telemedicine, distance education, and streaming of traditional television content, have become increasingly important as drivers of communication networks as they rapidly increase bandwidth and digital capabilities; *and*

WHEREAS, Public utility commissions in the fifty States, U.S. Territories, and the District of Columbia, have become increasingly involved in facilitating and encouraging the deployment of higher speed broadband networks – whether they be hybrid networks, conversion from TDM switching to all-IP networks, or fiber to the node or fiber to the home – through various regulatory mechanisms, such as placing conditions on traditional communications carriers as they acquire other carriers (merger conditions), through the ETC designation process pursuant to Section 214 for federal universal service funding, or through collaboration with the FCC pursuant to affirmative authority under Section 706 of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 granted to both the FCC and State commissions; *now, therefore be it*

RESOLVED, That the Board of Directors of the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners (NARUC), convened at its 2014 Winter Committee Meetings in Washington, D.C., expresses its support and encouragement for the efforts of the National Association of Public Affairs Networks (NAPAN) to establish such public affairs networks in each of the fifty States, U.S. Territories, and the District of Columbia, in the manner most appropriate for each State; *and be it further*

RESOLVED, That each Commission is encouraged to coordinate efforts with the FCC, the executive and legislative branches in each capitol, and other stakeholders to enhance more robust digital communications over broadband networks or other media as a means to enhance the citizens' understanding of representative democracy at the State level.

Sponsored by the Committee on Telecommunications

Adopted by the NARUC Board of Directors, February 12, 2014