



March 10, 2005

Senator Steve Ogden  
Texas Senate  
Room 3S.3  
P.O. Box 12068  
Austin, Texas 78711

RE: HB789 – Section 54.202

The Honorable Steve Ogden,

The purpose of this letter is to solicit your support in opposing HB789, specifically Section 54.202. The text of this section reads as follows:

Sec. 54.202. PROHIBITED MUNICIPAL SERVICES. A municipality or municipally owned utility may not, directly or indirectly, on its own or with another entity, offer to the public:

- (1) a service for which a certificate is required;
- (2) a service as a network provider; or
- (3) any telecommunications or information service, without regard to the technology platform used to provide the service.

If passed, this legislation will pose a real threat to one of Taylor's most successful enterprises. Several years ago, when the opportunity arose through a program made possible by HB 2128 to provide Community Network Services in rural areas with help from TIF Funds, the City of Taylor took full advantage by developing an extraordinarily successful Community Network program. Community leaders were determined to address some fundamental needs of our City through technology and pulled together to develop an application for a Telecommunications Infrastructure Fund (TIF) Community Network grant. To use the word intense to describe this effort would be inadequate. Eight partners met continuously over a 4-month period to make sure our application truly reflected what a community network should be for Taylor, Texas.

The City of Taylor was awarded a \$500,000 Implementation Grant in 2002 and worked very hard to make the committee's vision a reality. Our Community Network deployed and continues to provide 14 public access points throughout the community with special emphasis on high-needs areas. Our busiest access points have been in public housing locations where there is a continuous flow of school-age children, patiently waiting for their turn on the computer. One site, the Avery Center, has developed a sort of synergy and become a place to not only use the technology, but a site where homework is being done, older students are helping younger students and adults visit to develop resumes, search for jobs or catch up on e-mail. With terminals at the local HEB, County Annex,

Williamson County Grain and Senior Center, TaylorCNET effectively serves all segments of our population.

Although public access has been highly successful, it is not the only area of the project to shine. Over 700 students have received free computer skills training, with some classes being taught in Spanish and others designed specifically for Senior Citizens. A community portal has been developed which serves as the window into Taylor. This portal is being seen as not only a powerful marketing tool for the community, but a very practical place for all citizens to stay informed and receive much needed information. We have given Taylor students the ability to experience educational opportunities heretofore unavailable to a rural community. Middle School students were able to visit with Holocaust Survivors after completing the Diary of Anne Frank through the amazing technology of videoconferencing. Elementary school math students were able to visit with a world renowned Architect while studying the subject of scaling. A young man attaining the high honor of Eagle Scout was able to have his mother, currently working in Doha, Qatar, participate and view his Court of Honor ceremony in its entirety because Taylor now has the ability to videoconference. It has been very gratifying to provide this type of exciting educational opportunity to students attending a smaller school district.

I would be remiss if I did not mention that in addition to all these great community activities and enhancements, Taylor became a viable market for broadband services. Broadband ISPs had not been interested in coming to Taylor because the market was not large enough. With the TIF grant, TaylorCNET deployed a wireless infrastructure which provided connectivity to the Technology Center and 14 public access points. This phase of the project attracted a wireless Internet Service Provider who completed the infrastructure to reach all areas of the city and many outlying areas with the fastest Internet service available. When Taylor opened a new Industrial Park several years ago, new tenants were extremely interested in broadband access as a need of their business. Time Warner was the only option at the time and opted to not provide that service because of the investment. With the deployment of the wireless network, tenants in the Mustang Creek Industrial Park now have broadband access.

As mentioned previously, TaylorCNET is the result of a partnership between eight entities. Those partners are the City of Taylor, Taylor Economic Development Corporation, Taylor ISD, Williamson County, Taylor Housing Authority, Johns Community Hospital, Taylor Chamber of Commerce and Temple College at Taylor. Community Networks have disintegrated all over the state because partners could not work together. That has certainly not been the case in Taylor. This partnership is just as strong, if not stronger, as when the idea was born several years ago. As a matter of fact, TaylorCNET just received another grant to continue to enhance its current offerings. We see this legislation as a real threat to what can only be considered a tremendous success. There is nothing to be gained by severing the relationship between TaylorCNET and the City of Taylor, but there is much to be lost. No one is in this project to make money. It is and always has been our goal to someday be sustainable, with enough money to replace equipment when needed.

A successful outcome of the establishment of a viable community network that can provide Internet service to people who otherwise would not be able to afford it, requires a tremendous amount of effort, dedication and will on the part of community leaders. For this reason, not too many of these projects have been successful. It would be a pity to penalize unnecessarily those few projects that have been successful. This would indeed be the outcome if this legislation were passed as presented. Again, many of the services provided by TaylorCNET are for those that otherwise would be denied access to what is becoming an integral part of ones every day living experience. TaylorCNET is actually helping to produce future customers for commercial ISP by training them to appreciate the advantages of Internet use so that they will be willing subscribers when they are able to afford it.

For the reasons stated previously, we urgently seek your assistance in helping us make a stand against this bill. Please let me know if you have any questions or if I can assist in any way.

Respectfully,

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Donald R. Hill  
Mayor, City of Taylor  
Council Representative District 1

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John McDonald  
Mayo Pro Tem  
Council Representative District 3

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Bernabe Gonzales  
Council Representative, District 2

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Ella Jez  
Council Representative, District 4

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Tim Mikeska  
Council Representative, At large