

Senate Business and Commerce
Interim Hearing on August 14, 2012
RE: Statewide Telecommunication Discounts
Oral Testimony: Roosevelt Weeks on behalf of the Texas Library Association

Good morning. My name is Roosevelt Weeks and I am the Deputy Director for the Houston Public Library. I am here representing the Texas Library Association. Thank you so much for the opportunity to speak before you today in support of the statewide telecommunication discounts to schools and libraries. Without these discounts, libraries and schools would not be able to provide vital services to citizens of this great state

Because of the availability of telecommunication discounts public libraries and schools have been able to deliver quality network connectivity to millions of citizens to make a wide variety of information readily available and to help bridge the digital divide.

- There are over 550 public library systems in Texas. These libraries offer open and robust internet services to people of all ages within the communities they serve.
- 64% of libraries in Texas report that they are the only source of free internet access in their communities. As the vast majority of libraries in Texas serve small and rural communities, libraries serve as critical points of access to technology, technology instruction, and electronic resources in these small remote areas. And, further, many informational resources and databases are only available electronically.
- 93% of Texas public libraries help strengthen the workforce by making available to citizens access and use of online employment resources, including job searches, creating resumes, and submitting employment applications.

As the largest library in the state and 7th largest in the country, the Houston Public Library provides over 2800 public access computers for its customers. In FY12, we had over 1.2 million computer users, over 900,000 WiFi users, and over 2.5 million internet visitors. Citizens are waiting in line for our libraries to open their doors so they can have access. All of our computers are used all day every day. Providing this volume of access to technology was only made possible because of the availability of statewide telecommunication discounts. We are indeed fulfilling a vital need in our community.

In terms of dollars, the Houston Public Library saves over a half million dollars every year because of the discounts. This equates to more than 30 Full Time Employees. These savings also allows us to provide longer public service hours to citizens which in turn allows us to provide:

- A comfortable place to go after school to have access to the internet to assist with their homework;
- A place for unemployed citizens to have access to employment databases receive job search assistance; and,

- A safe place for our senior citizens to stay cool during the hot Texas summers.

In Houston, the library has broad support from our citizens and elected officials. Even with this support, recent reductions in funding have had an enormous impact on the services that we are able to provide. Without the current level of telecommunication discounts, which equate to well over half a million dollars, to ensure continued telecommunication connectivity, the Houston Public Library could be faced with drastic budget cuts, staff layoffs and cuts in vital services to citizens.

On behalf of the library community, I ask for your continued support of this valuable and needed program. These discounts greatly facilitate the ability of libraries statewide to support the millions of Texans who depend on libraries as their only access point to technology.

Thank you for your time this morning and for your continued commitment to the citizens of this great state. I am happy to answer any questions.