

February 24, 2014

Senator Larry Teague, Chair
Representative Duncan Baird, Chair
Joint Budget Committee
State Capitol, Room 320
Little Rock, AR 72201

Dear Senator Teague & Representative Baird,

I am asking you to support SB 146, which will appropriate \$10 million in general improvement funds to provide Internet access to Arkansas children across the state. Our children deserve the same access to educational resources as those children in other states, and the lack of broadband is hindering those opportunities. Over 75% of our school districts indicated they had experienced problems with bandwidth. SB 146 will not solve this issue, but it will certainly move us in the right direction.

AAEA has testified numerous times in front of legislative committees asking for help with broadband. We know the key to Arkansas's economic future is ensuring our children have the ability to compete in the 21st century. The only way our children will be able to compete is by having adequate broadband. We must make short and long-term investments to ensure every local school district in Arkansas has the resources they need to prepare our children for the challenges they will face.

Again, this appropriation will not solve all of our broadband problems, however, it's a step in the right direction. This appropriation will help alleviate many of our problems by funding connections to classrooms through 2015 – improving access and increasing capacity to localities that need it most. The appropriation is also very timely as districts work to implement the requirements of Act 1280, the Digital Learning Act of 2013. This Act requires all entering ninth grade students next year to take at least one digital course before they are eligible to graduate.

Funding will be used to pay for private provider service and allocations will be based on the economic needs of the respective school district. To be clear, these funds allow for local control and will not impact local contracts. They will not be used to fund AREON or the middle mile. What these funds will do is help strengthen education and prepare our students for the future.

School administrators across the state ask for your support of SB 146 for the \$10 million appropriation for broadband in Arkansas. Thank you for the work you do and for your support of Arkansas students.

Sincerely,



Dr. Richard Abernathy
Executive Director

Cc: Governor Mike Beebe, Dr. Tom Kimbrell, Arkansas Superintendents