Testimony of
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on behalf of AARP

Hearing on "Why Broadband Matters"

Committee on Science and Transportation
United States Senate

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Chairman Inouye, Ranking Member Hutchison, and Members of the Commerce

Committee, I am Mara Mayor from Bethesda, Maryland. I am a member of AARP's

Board of Directors.   I am honored to appear before the Committee this morning on

behalf of AARP[1] to provide our perspective on the question of "Why Broadband

Matters."

Broadband matters to AARP Members. High-quality broadband networks have the

potential to make the world more accessible to persons over age 50, providing convenient

pathways to the economic and social activities that are not only vital for leading

comfortable and meaningful lives, but also for fostering and sustaining livable

communities.   Creating livable communities is an important policy goal for AARP.

More than just a concept, livable communities seek to combine diverse and affordable

housing, adequate mobility options, employment opportunities, entertainment and

supportive community services to allow persons of all ages to remain independent, active

and engaged.

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[1] AARP is a nonprofit, nonpartisan membership organization that helps people age 50+ maintain independence, choice, and control in ways that are beneficial and affordable to them and to society as a whole. With 40 million members, it is the largest organization representing the interests of Americans age 50 and older and their families.

Livable communities are connected communities. While all people have a fundamental need to connect with one another and be part of a broader community, staying connected is particularly important for older adults.   "Gerontologists identify active engagement with life, which involves continued involvement with productive activities and maintenance of social ties, as a critical component of successful aging."[2] Older adults often find that later life presents more potential opportunities for enhanced working, learning and social contact than ever before.   And with the age 50 and older population projected to increase by 21 percent by 2020, and those over 65 growing by 33 percent, all communities need to find ways to keep this large and growing senior population connected and engaged.[3]

AARP views broadband internet technology as the 21st century bridge and facilitator for enhanced connectivity and successful aging.   Available and affordable broadband can overcome many critical limitations for older users that are inherent in current communications technology. Communicating through telephone calls or e-mails does not involve the physical presence that occurs with in-person meeting and thus does not convey visual and physical cues, such as facial features or body language, that not only enrich conversations, but convey critical information. For example, doctors trying to diagnose or treat a patient by telephone would not benefit from important visual cues, such as the grimace of a patient in pain or the lack of eye contact from a depressed patient. E-mails are often open to misinterpretation because of the inherent difficulty in conveying emotion or tone in written communication. In addition, sending an email does

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[2] Rowe, J.W., Kahn, R.L. (1988), *Successful Aging*, New York: Random House, define successful aging as the ability to maintain three key behaviors or characteristics: (1) low risk of disease and disease related disability, (2) high mental and physical functiom, and (3) active engagement with life.
[3] Beyond 50.05: A Report to the Nation on Livable Communities, "Creating Environments for Successful Aging

not guarantee an immediate response, making it an ineffective tool for communicating urgent or emergency messages.

All persons should have the means to stay connected to an extent that ensures independence and quality of life. In this regard, the goal of federal policy should be one of assuring sufficient or requisite connectivity: which is "the state of having robust and reliable communication and/or transportation modes, with operable alternative work-around options, so that contact may be initiated or maintained at the rate, richness, and intensity that we desire for a given task or social outcome."

High-quality broadband networks will help many older Americans achieve "requisite connectivity". Broadband allows for greater information–carrying capacity and speed than earlier networks and enables real-time interaction and more precise, expressive communication, almost of the kind that can occur during an in-person, face-to-face meeting.[4]

Telemedicine, support monitoring devices, interactive video and home health care all become more viable options for consumers with broadband, particularly persons with limited mobility or those not well enough to travel. In a recent survey of Older Americans age 65 and over, 98% of respondents agree that they like to know as much as they can about their health conditions regardless of their demographic characteristics. Furthermore, almost all (96%) of respondents agreed they would like to help their doctor monitor their health. More than a majority of respondents agreed they wish their doctor had a device that allows him/her to perform a variety of standard telepharmacy tasks such as checking medication history, prescription drug benefits, insurance coverage of specific

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[4] AARP Public Policy Institute, Connecting for Successful Aging: Promoting Broadband for the Opportunities and Challenges of Later Life, Chris A. Baker

medications and electronic forwarding of prescriptions to their pharmacy to be filled before travel for pick-up.[5]

Distance-learning is not only facilitated with broadband, but can be conducted with greater personal convenience and with greater visual enhancement than previously available. This is especially true for persons with jobs, disabilities or family care responsibilities that make it difficult to travel to a classroom.

Many of AARP's age 50+ members are still active in the workforce and find telecommuting very attractive with a high-speed broadband connection. Trends indicate that people will work much longer as they continue to mature:

> According to an AARP study on work and careers, 69 percent of workers age 45 to 74 plan to work in some capacity during their retirement years.

> Many, however, want to work on different terms, with more flexibility and autonomy, than they did during their earlier careers.

> In fact, 70 percent of workers age 45 to 74 say they are looking for ways to better balance their work and personal lives, and 41 percent report that the ability to work from home is an absolutely essential part of their ideal job. [6]

Not only can affordable access to broadband internet make telecommuting a more realistic option for older workers, it can enhance opportunities for volunteer work as well. For organizations facing shortages of volunteers, virtual volunteer with broadband technology will allow greater numbers of people with time constraints, physical

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[5] AARP "Healthy @Home", Knowledge Management. Linda L. Barrett, Ph.D.
[6] AARP "Healthy @Home"

limitation or home-care obligations to engage in needed charitable activities with organizations in their own communities and around the world.

Where broadband is widely available, innovative uses of videoconferencing can provide older consumers with unlimited opportunities to expand their civic and social ties and enrich their lives.

However, despite the bright promise of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, universal access of advanced telecommunications services has not been fully realized. With all of the research and potential benefits of high-quality broadband internet technology, our nation that invented the Internet is losing its place as a leader in the deployment of broadband Internet technology. Simply put, the digital divide for older Americans remains far too wide:

> Thirty eight percent of rural adults have broadband at home, as compared with 57 percent for urban adults, and 60 percent for suburban adults.

> Twenty-five percent of households with income under $20,000 per year have broadband at home, as compared to 85 percent of households with income greater than $100,000 per year.

> Fifty percent of adults age 50 to 64 and 19 percent of those 65 and older have broadband in their home. [7]

A new public policy toward broadband is needed to stimulate the development of universally available, affordable and high-quality broadband.

A new public policy for broadband deployment should incorporate the following principles:

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[7] AARP "Aging in Internet Time ---Harnessing the Benefits of Broadband for Older Americans"

1. Greater promotion of broadband adoption, especially among the older and underserved populations;

2. Promotion of open and standardized broadband platforms;

3. Transparency and accountability that ensures the collection and public reporting of timely and accurate data on the quality of the broadband technology being deployed, the prices at which the broadband technology is available, and the interoperability of networks and technologies; and

4. Increased use of broadband mapping to ensure the efficient utilization of resources to achieve rapid advance of broadband deployment.[8]

AARP encourages Congress to pass broadband mapping legislation. Senate bill 1492, the Broadband Data Improvement Act passed by this Committee and House-passed legislation H.R. 3919, the Broadband Census of America of 2007, will help local communities and states assess their broadband inventory. Broadband mapping will collect accurate data that demonstrate current broadband deployment, forecast deployment milestones and identify areas where follow-up measures are required. The information that these bills provide is extremely important and is needed now if all American are to realize the promise of broadband technology.

Mr. Chairman, helping people age 50 and older stay connected, informed and engaged is central to AARP's work of encouraging positive social change and fostering more livable communities. The potential and possibilities of affordable broadband technology are unlimited. Increased broadband deployment can greatly enhance the ability of older Americans to remain independent in their communities, providing

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[8] AARP "Aging in Internet Time"

convenient access to the services and activities they need to address the complexities of aging and lead more comfortable and meaningful lives.

Thank you.