



# Romaine Quinn

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 75th ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

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## AB 798

In the same way that President Dwight Eisenhower recognized that highway infrastructure was crucial to the 20<sup>th</sup> century's economy, broadband internet is the crucial 21<sup>st</sup> century infrastructure. It impacts every area of our lives: from obvious areas such as education and economic development, to less obvious areas such as health care and deciding where to live – no area of our lives is untouched by this technology.

As part of the Rural Wisconsin Initiative, Assembly Bill 798 will grow Wisconsin's broadband expansion grant program, a powerful tool for our state to attract new residents and give current residents the access to opportunities they too often miss out on.

Currently, the grant program has a \$6 million budget, but can spend only \$1.5 million of that money per year. However, this year alone, the Public Service Commission, which administers the grants, received \$4.5 million dollars in applications. The projects that were approved have improved broadband internet access for approximately 2310 residents, and served numerous businesses; thousands more would have benefitted from the projects not approved. Moreover, all but 4 of these projects involved community partnerships, ensuring that the recipients have a vested interest in completing these projects quickly and efficiently.

AB 798 will increase the budget for the broadband expansion program to \$10 million, and allow the PSC to distribute all of that money in the 2016-17 fiscal year. The \$10 million figure allows us to greatly expand the range of projects we are funding, while maintaining a tailored, focused approach and ensuring that we are not funding frivolous projects or duplicating services.

As I mentioned, this infrastructure affects every area of our lives. Schools that offer distance learning courses electronically have greater options and flexibility for offering programs that impact students' abilities to go to college. In an increasingly digitized workplace, the ability to work remotely or telecommute is increasingly seen as an important perk that companies can

offer; without solid internet access, our rural residents, who have as much talent as anyone in the state, miss out on the potential for good jobs. Businesses need an online presence, and the many options for selling through online-only distributors handicaps small rural businesses particularly.

More deeply, access to internet impacts quality of healthcare in myriad ways. We in Madison are familiar with the great work done by Epic – as urban hospitals move to electronic record keeping and sharing, rural hospitals will need to be able to keep up. Cutting-edge remote surgeries depend on broadband access to give rural residents expanded access to the best doctors across the country. Ambulance services increasingly use handheld devices to communicate with their hospitals while picking up a patient and returning, giving the medical teams early access to life-saving information.

Moreover, broadband access is increasingly seen as a dealbreaker when it comes to deciding where to live. Certainly, millennials expect good internet connections – but even older and more established families are coming to see good access to internet service as a “must-have” when deciding to buy a new house. You will hear more about programs that target new families and encourage opportunities to move to our rural counties – these programs will help to counteract the coming population declines in outstate areas. However, without being able to offer fast internet connections, we risk making these programs less effective.

Moreover, these programs are cost-effective, targeted, and detailed to the conditions of our state. Expanding the pot to \$10 million will give PSC the bandwidth to ensure that vital projects in Wisconsin get funded, but does not flood the market to such an extent that frivolous or duplicitous projects are funded. We will then be able to use these results for a substantive conversation in the next budget regarding the extent of broadband need in the state.

Thank you.



# TOM TIFFANY

STATE SENATOR • 12TH SENATE DISTRICT

## Testimony on Assembly Bill 798

### Assembly Committee on Mining, and Rural Development

February 4, 2016

I want to thank Chairman Kulp and members of the committee for hearing Assembly Bill 798 today.

Assembly Bill 798 is one piece of legislation included in the Rural Wisconsin Initiative. The Rural Wisconsin Initiative is a push to draw attention to many of the problems facing rural Wisconsin. The four core issues the initiative attempts to address include education, health care, technology, and workforce development.

High speed internet access has become almost a necessity in today's world – especially for education and business. However, in many parts of our state the infrastructure for broadband is lacking or non-existent.

There has been a push to address this problem in recent years. Wisconsin's broadband expansion grant program was established to help build community partnerships to bring broadband to underserved areas of the state.

Currently, \$6 million is available to be distributed by the Public Service Commission over the next four years. In the most recent grant application period, there were \$4.5 million in broadband expansion grant requests. This bill would increase the funding from \$6 million to \$10 million and would allow those grants to be awarded in fiscal year 2015-16 to 2016-17. Essentially, there would be \$5 million available annually.

I want to thank Representatives Ed Brooks, Romans Quinn, and Travis Tranel for their work on this bill, and I would also like to thank members of the committee for hearing this bill today. Please support Assembly Bill 794.



TO: Assembly Committee on Mining and Rural Development  
Representative Kulp, Chair

FROM: Jeremy Levin, MHA, Director of Advocacy

DATE: February 4, 2016

RE: SUPPORT Rural Wisconsin Initiative

The Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative (RWHC), owned and operated by forty rural community hospitals, thanks you for this opportunity to share our thoughts on the seven bills that comprise the Rural Wisconsin Initiative. RWHC thanks the 21 lawmakers who have authored this effort.

RWHC has long supported cross-sector collaboration and realizes the need to improve more than just community health status, and that is why we wholeheartedly support the Rural Wisconsin Initiative. Some of our member hospitals have taken to community initiatives aimed at retaining a younger workforce by collaborating with high schools and tech schools to make sure students will have the skills needed to match the jobs available and other members have worked with employers in the area to make sure there is adequate child care available to entice young families to their communities and the jobs available.

#### AB793

Attracting and retaining good teachers is a challenge for rural schools. Health care has faced similar workforce challenges and one tool to attract health care workers have been loan forgiveness programs; these should be tried to attract new teachers, too. Such a program could help new teachers decide where to settle and where to teach, just as health care loan forgiveness programs are tied to practice. It would also encourage students interested in teaching to come back to their hometowns after their educations are complete, rural health education programs, such as the Wisconsin Academy Rural Medicine, seek a rural background to also gauge chance to practice in rural areas.

#### AB794

This bill requires the Higher Educational Aids Board to make student loan reimbursement payments on behalf of rural county residents. These "rural opportunity zones" will look to incentivize young people looking to relocate after finishing their post-secondary education. Currently, the demographics of rural areas skew older than more urban and suburban areas in the state; likewise, rural health care providers reflect these demographics and as they retire, good health care jobs will be available.

#### AB795

RWHC believes that the \$500,000 increase in Youth Apprenticeship program is another valuable tool for students. The program is designed for high school students who want hands-on learning in an occupational area



with classroom instruction. The funds go to rural schools, tech colleges and businesses that are working together to equip students with the skills they will need to succeed in their local industries.

#### AB796

The increase in the Apprenticeship Completion Award program, which partially reimburses eligible apprentices, sponsors and employers for certain costs of related instruction, will continue to support “on the job” training. Health care has had a long history in apprenticeship learning across different health provider professionals. This can support other health care focused entities like the Wisconsin Area Health Education Centers (AHEC) that seeks to improve access to quality health care by developing community-based health professions training programs and enhancing health education resources across the state by allowing students to experience firsthand the challenges, opportunities and rewards of health professions.

#### AB797

This bill supports the Wisconsin Rural Physician Residency Assistance Program (WRPRAP), which has successfully drawn physicians to rural communities. In 2011, RWHC Proposed the Wisconsin Rural Training Track Collaborative to the WRPRAP for start-up funding. In just three years these funds have made it possible to grow from the Collaborative’s initial eight organizations interested in developing and sustaining rural graduate medical education (GME) funding, to 28 hospitals, clinics, and residencies investigating and developing rural GME, and that number is growing. The new bill would propose an increase of WRPRAP funding by \$250,000, to strengthen residency programs for doctors pursuing obstetrics and gynecology specialties.

#### AB798

We support enhanced funding for rural broadband expansion grants. In 2007, RWHC Information Technology Network (ITN) incorporated as a 501(c)3 organization dedicated to providing member hospitals with shared health information services. In 2013, RWHC ITN became one of the first networks in the country to be designated as a Healthcare Connect Fund (HCF) Consortium, helping 29 hospitals and nearly 70 sites apply for broadband funding through the new FCC HCF subsidy program.

#### AB799

The proposed Rural STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) Grant legislation will help small school districts in rural Wisconsin communities start, expand, and maintain STEM education programs. These education programs help to shape students’ interests and prepare them to pursue the high wage, high demand careers that are involved in advance manufacturing that can be found in rural areas.

Thank you again for this opportunity to comment on and express our support for the Rural Wisconsin Initiative. We encourage the Committee to act on these bills so that they might become law and more can be done to help rural areas and the health care providers that serve these areas of Wisconsin.