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Wireless Philadelphia Rejects Assertions of Ethos Group Publication

Cites growing community, funding support for Wireless Movement

Immediately following this afternoon's hearing on Wireless Philadelphia in City Council, the Media Mobilizing Project will host a panel in City Council on a publication released today by the Ethos Group, an Illinois consultancy. The publication is critical of Wireless Philadelphia, arguing that Philadelphia's citywide wireless network should be publicly owned.

"This is a great day for Wireless Philadelphia," said CEO Greg Goldman. "On the same day, in the same place, this ambitious public-private Initiative to extend internet access to all neighborhoods will be attacked for being too much government by some and for not being public enough by others. We must be doing something right!"

In just over one year of operations, and with network construction still underway, Wireless Philadelphia has raised over \$1M in new funds from 30 different sources and forged partnerships with over 30 community-based organizations that already serve the Digital Inclusion population, with many more to come.

The publication's principal author, Josh Brietbart, argues from the perspective that public ownership is the only effective "business model" for municipal broadband projects, and the publication is crafted to support this view. Thus the publication's conclusions cannot be labeled "outcomes" but must be considered as assertions based on a specific point of view.

The publication argues that WP yielded to political pressure when it accepted EarthLink's bid to own and operate the network. This falsely assumes that City funds were available to build and operate a citywide wireless network. The project would likely never have been approved under a public ownership model.

In stark contrast to the assertions of the Ethos Group publication, substantial public input has been included in the process of developing the Wireless Philadelphia initiative at every step. WP has forged cooperative partnerships with a broad range of community-based organizations that already serve the Digital Inclusion population. Early discussions with these community organizations drove the formation of the Digital Inclusion program, and WP works with each community partner to develop a unique program that meets the needs of the community that organization serves, so strong public input is ongoing.

The piece does not draw on new research. None of the key players from Wireless Philadelphia - members of the Wireless Philadelphia Executive Committee, who were involved during the organization's formation period on which the publication focuses; consultants; current staff and board; business partners; community partners; nor retail or digital inclusion customers - were contacted or interviewed by the author as the publication was being prepared. While critical of WP, the publication does not highlight any other programs of remotely comparable scale that are working toward Digital Inclusion.

The publication also argues that WP focuses insufficiently on direct services. In fact, the service delivery model employed by Wireless Philadelphia is specifically designed to dovetail with existing programs and processes so as not to create a new administrative structure, and is set up to keep administrative costs flat even as direct program expenditures dramatically increase over time.

For further information, please contact Greg Goldman, Wireless Philadelphia, at (215) 990-5998.