

Date: August 7, 2019
To: Chloe Mandara
RE: Testimony for the Senate Communications & Technology Committee
Testifier: Chad Carrick, President & CEO, REA Energy Cooperative, Inc.

Introduction:

Pennsylvania Rural Electric Cooperatives represent 230,000 rural households, businesses and industries, with more than 600,000 consumers. The 13 cooperatives in Pennsylvania own and maintain about 12.5 percent of the electric distribution lines in the state, covering nearly one-third of the Commonwealth's land area in 42 counties. These lines, an essential component of rural business and industry, represent one of the Commonwealth's largest non-governmental investments in rural infrastructure.

As locally owned (electric cooperatives are owned by their members) and locally controlled businesses, electric cooperatives play vital roles in maintaining the economic health of their rural communities - providing hundreds of jobs and contributing to the overall quality of life.

Most Pennsylvania Electric Cooperatives (cooperatives) started in the 1930's to 1940's and are not for profit. The cooperatives are strong supporters of the proliferation of broadband and are open to ideas on how to serve our members. In fact, one cooperative, Tri County REC, is going to install their own fiber network in order to bring highspeed broadband to the service area.

Case for Rural Broadband:

Working for REA Energy for 18 years and trying to get broadband in Indiana and Cambria Counties is something I personally have worked towards with local leaders for the past 12 years. However, make no mistake, even though I have worked locally to improve broadband access, every cooperative member knows this is a statewide issue that needs to be resolved in order to compete with the non-rural areas and more importantly with other states.

High speed broadband would benefit the commonwealth in many ways including:

- Economic development
- Telecommuting
- Tele-doc
- Tele-vet (especially large animal veterinarians for our dairy producers)
- On-line education at all levels
- Business development
- On-line teaching
- E-commerce (tax revenue for the state)
- Homeland security (smarter and well-coordinated electric grid systems)
- Entertainment options

The biggest obstacle is funding and coordination between providers and the expectations of the as built design. Additionally, please keep all rural areas in mind. There a lot of differing definitions on what is considered rural. For the past 18 years, the one thing I learned as I spoke with members regarding broadband access is everyone wants access and once someone does have access that's when he/she realizes that they **need** broadband access.

Thank you for allowing me to testify today regarding this very important issue.

Chad Carrick