

Senate Communications & Technology Committee

Broadband Access Roundtable

Pennsylvania State Grange

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Thank you very much for having the Pennsylvania State Grange participate. I am Wayne Campbell, Pennsylvania State Grange President.

Pennsylvania State Grange has represented rural Pennsylvanians, not only agricultural producers, but rural and urban citizens, since 1873. For several years in Harrisburg, we have been pushing for universal access to high-speed Broadband for rural Pennsylvania. This is our number one legislative priority.

I appreciate the interest of the Federal Trade Commission in Broadband expansion. It reflects some of President Trump's earlier executive orders and various FCC rules. One FCC guideline is "Accelerating Wireline Broadband Deployment by Removing Barriers to Infrastructure Investment" (Source: May 15,2017 Federal Register).

Part of the synopsis reads:

II. Pole Attachment Reforms

3. Pole attachments are a key input for many broadband deployment projects. Reforms which reduce pole attachment costs and speed access to utility poles would remove significant barriers to broadband infrastructure deployment and in turn increase broadband availability and competition in the provision of high-speed services.

National Grange President Betsy Huber worked on the FCC task force to develop guidelines to standardize placement of small cell broadband facilities on utility poles.

What has Pennsylvania done? Well, House Bill 1400 was introduced last session of the General Assembly and again this session. Despite hearings, two at which the Pennsylvania State Grange testified, the legislation has gone nowhere. On the Senate side, a sponsorship memo was circulated on May 21, 2020 but a bill was not yet introduced as of October 19. The memo said, in part,

In order to meet those ever-growing demands, the wireless industry is deploying "Small Cell" facilities in our Commonwealth. However, because investment decisions are made municipality by municipality, wireless providers may face varying and inconsistent fees and procedures that slow their ability to deploy this new and modern infrastructure. With an array of municipal ordinances governing wireless infrastructure siting, compliance is time-consuming and costly.

The FCC approved an order streamlining the process for the installation of small cells which went into effect in January of 2019. This legislation builds on that action ...and provides additional certainty and

implementation guiderails specific to Pennsylvania that are intended to benefit all parties. In addition, this legislation preserves local government authority over zoning and land use, including the ability to approve or deny wireless infrastructure siting permit applications consistent with common-sense limitations. It also provides protections to municipalities to ensure that smaller staffs will not be overwhelmed with small cell applications.

Where am I going with this? Legislative Inaction.

Simple. The Federal Government is not going to take Pennsylvania seriously unless we do something – anything!

There have been at least nineteen Broadband bills introduced this legislative session. None are law. Although there are three bills that could conceivably be passed by the General Assembly and sent to the Governor before the session's end, that is not the best track record.

Sadly, the General Assembly did not even pick the low-hanging fruit. House Bill 2786 would have dedicated \$50 million of the one billion dollars in unspent Federal CARES Act money to areas hardest hit by no Broadband during this COVID-19 crisis. Now, it is too late to do anything on that bill.

The One Bright Spot

The one bright spot in all of this is the Senate Communications and Technology Committee where five Broadband bills and two Senate resolutions were referred to the committee. You did your part. This committee acted on every single one.

We applaud the work of this committee. You all have worked diligently on this issue. But we are very frustrated at the fact that the General Assembly has not moved further faster. Next year, all of us will have to start again.

The other issue is the State Budget.

If Broadband access is so important to Pennsylvania, why is it not reflected in the State Budget?

The **Governor's Office of Broadband Initiatives** was introduced with much **fanfare**. Sounds like a success story until one sees that the Governor never proposed any resources to help it work on its mission. Sadly, there is not even a full-time staff

person. It does what it can but it is crippled. The General Assembly has the power to make the Office more effective through the State Budget but there is no traction on that idea yet.

On Thursday, October 15, USDA announced that Blue Fiber Corporation received a \$750,000 loan from the Federal Government to bring high-speed Broadband to 237 households, 34 businesses, 8 farms, 2 educational facilities, 2 town halls, a post office and a fire station in Crawford County. While welcome, it is a drop in the bucket compared to the need.

Unless Pennsylvania gives the Governor's Office of Broadband Initiatives resources or creates an independent Broadband Authority, we will not have a coordinated strategy to attract Broadband expansion from the Federal Government and non-governmental organizations. Areas of the state without high-speed Broadband will continue to suffer.

Thank you again for inviting the Pennsylvania State Grange to participate. Please count on us as a resource.