



**House Energy and Telecommunications Committee
Testimony
January 23, 2019**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. We will first tell you about the Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT).

VLCT

We are an association of all 246 cities and towns in the state. We provide technical assistance and education to local officials; liability, unemployment and workers' compensation insurance; and advocacy for our members. Our membership adopts a municipal policy for a biennium that includes 28 separate policy sections. We follow approximately 300 bills over the course of a biennium - all those bills that potentially affect local governments. We write a legislative update every week that you are in session. It is available on our website by 2:00 on Fridays and in your (physical) mailboxes on Tuesdays.

Priorities for Energy and Telecommunications

Key to success, sustainability and resiliency of cities and towns are energy, broadband and telecommunications capacity. This infrastructure is absolutely essential to growing Vermont's economy, to assuring access to a wide range of services including health care, business and financial management, public safety and education, as well as keeping Vermonters both informed and safe in emergency situations whether natural or man-made.

Cities and towns are committed to assuring that residents and businesses can increase energy efficiency and reduce energy consumption that results in lower overall costs, and to construction of renewable energy facilities that are scaled appropriately to the size of our communities and designed to serve those host communities.

Cities and towns need to write an energy plan and regional commissions need to approve that plan in order for the town to receive substantial deference when a project is proposed to the Public Utilities Commission in their town.

Cities and towns are committed to:

- ❖ achieving state of the art broadband service in the farthest reaches of the smallest Vermont towns
- ❖ assuring robust and resilient first responder communication networks throughout the state
- ❖ providing reliable cell service throughout the state and
- ❖ assuring that all are available at reasonable cost in collaboration with local officials and with attention to the land use planning priorities of the host municipalities.

Municipal Capacity

The work, expertise and resources required to accomplish these objectives are enormous. Whereas larger towns may have the necessary expertise, they also are in areas that are generally well served. There is no way that local officials in more remote communities seeking to implement projects can accomplish these goals on their own. Nor are the multi-national corporations that deploy broadband or telecommunications particularly interested in rural Vermont.

Vermont municipalities need help to bridge the gap. We need a template for taking action on building out 21st century infrastructure and financial assistance in order to actually implement projects.

Vermont will not spur new growth; significant numbers of people will not move to underserved towns with their businesses or to start their businesses; and young people will not choose to stay without this infrastructure.

Your committee is well aware of these constraints. We welcome the opportunity to work with you this session to achieve real progress on realizing these goals.

VLCT Municipal Policy

Telecommunications

VLCT supports:

- 3.01 (4) Providing statewide access to complete and affordable access to complete and affordable cellular and fiber optics service that benefits public safety and first responders and builds the economy.
- 4.04 (1) active participation by local governments in a transparent governance structure regulating development of cellular and fiber optics service and alternative connectivity solutions.
- 4.04 (2) service that is complete, statewide, and affordable to municipalities and public safety first responders that builds Vermont's economy and makes Vermont hospitable to a remote workforce.

Energy and Environment

VLCT supports

- 4.06(1) policies that empower municipalities to reduce local emissions, plan for and increase resiliency to the effects of climate change, and participate in the transition to a cleaner energy economy;

- 4.06 (3) ensuring the reliability of Vermont's energy supply, restoring balance between transitioning to renewable energy, and protecting land use priorities established in municipal plans and state land use goals.

Draft 2018 Telecommunications Plan

Objectives of the draft Vermont Telecommunications Plan call out bringing high quality broadband to the last mile. The draft states that 20,000 service locations in Vermont lack access to basic broadband today. While the draft plan describes the issues facing Vermont well, we believe it should recommend a much more aggressive timeline for achieving high speed state of the art broadband and telecommunications across the state. As well, the Public Service Department could be more helpful in finding and securing funds to implement projects.

“Unlike the top-down approach of the federal and state investments, reaching the last-mile will require a grass-roots approach that is founded on input and support of local communities, whose residents are best situated to decide what broadband solution fits their needs... Vermont cannot realistically promise every resident the best internet access available on the market absent substantial federal funding. However, Vermont can take steps toward closing the digital divide. First, the State should consider funding broadband expansion, either at the local level or through an existing state program such as the Connectivity Initiative. Any broadband solution must call on the resources of local communities and the stakeholders who directly benefit from internet access, such as commercial-edge providers, education, healthcare, agriculture, and energy sectors.” (Draft 2018 Telecommunications Plan Executive Summary)

“FirstNet, a public safety broadband network, is a project that will deploy a nationwide first-responder broadband network. Every state and territory across the nation, including Vermont, has opted into the deployment of the nationwide network. Work must now be done to ensure that our public safety networks are secure, resilient, and provide the coverage that first responders need to do their job. (Draft 2018 Telecommunications Plan Executive Summary)

The draft plan recommends:

“Telecommunications service quality standards should continue to apply to rural exchanges. Service quality protections should be strengthened

for rural customers in areas where competition is lacking. The state should consider incentives for improving last-mile service quality.

“The State should consider policies for enhancing the resiliency of wireless communications facilities by ensuring that such facilities are soundly constructed and have the ability to maintain electricity and connectivity during sustained power outages.

“The E-911 Board should continue its path toward greater security, reliability, and efficiency. As it hires a contractor for the E-911 system, the Board should ensure that the successful respondent will implement the recommendations made in the 911 Authority Report.”

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