

My name is Greg Marchildon and I am the VT state director of AARP VT, which has about 130,000 members statewide.

AARP supports broadband deployment to under and unserved communities and also supports policy and programs that facilitate broadband adoption.

The benefits of broadband internet access to older adults are well-recognized. Affordable, reliable internet access helps older adults to age in place productively and safely with a higher quality of life than would otherwise exist. Broadband is not a luxury, it is a necessity that needs to be deployed with a sense of urgency.

The broadband platform supports access to telemedicine, civic engagement, entertainment, on-line learning and other internet-based applications that address isolation and health challenges.

For example, telehealth helps older persons, especially in rural areas, obtain affordable health care. Telehealth supports live, two-way interaction between a person (patient, caregiver, or provider) and a provider using audiovisual telecommunications technology. It also allows for the transmission of recorded health history (for example, pre-recorded videos and digital images such as x-rays and photos) through a secure electronic communications system to a practitioner or specialist. Telehealth also enables remote patient monitoring.

AARP VT supports several key attributes for both deployment and adoption of state and local broadband:

- Competitively neutral, cost-effective, and transparent approaches to promoting deployment in unserved areas or areas where only low-speed broadband service is available.
- Initiatives that encourage competition or remove barriers to competition as a means to lower prices and higher service quality.

- Initiatives to expand municipal and electric-utility-deployed broadband systems (while opposing legislation that prohibits or impedes new broadband options) whether in unserved communities or as a competitive alternative.
- Initiatives that enable new entrants to co-locate on utility-owned infrastructure in public rights-of-way (e.g., poles, conduits), when in line with the best interest of municipalities.
- Resisting unsupported claims that deregulation is a prerequisite for investment in broadband and other advanced services.
- Deployment that is paired with measures that promote adoption and effective use of broadband services.
- Funding programs to support consumers, including older adults, who need assistance to adopt and benefit from new technologies and devices.
- Holding the line on consumer protections for broadband and voice services that currently exist under state law and seeking opportunities to expand them.

AARP VT strongly supports H.513, which was overwhelmingly passed by the House. This bill includes the necessary tools for cities and towns to determine the feasibility of deployment and adoption of broadband in their communities. We also believe that Vermont's electric utilities, with their long history of serving rural areas, are well positioned to help bring broadband internet access to the communities they serve.

AARP VT looks forward to working with this committee to bring broadband to communities throughout the state with this important legislation. We also stand ready to assist Vermonters with overcoming barriers to broadband adoption so that the benefits of this legislation can be widely realized.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and we ask for your support of H.513.