20 June 2020

Senate Finance Committee
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633

RE: H.966 provisions for broadband and CUDs

Chair Cummings & Committee Members:

I write this note to you as Chair of CVFiber, a Communications Union District (CUD) serving Central Vermont. Given the time-sensitivity of this topic, I did not have time to seek endorsement from our entire Governing Board, so this message reflects only my personal opinion and a general sense of the position of the rest of the Board.

H.966, though produced in a very short time, was produced by the House Energy and Technology Committee after a great deal of feedback by various CUDs and other stakeholders. The bill as it stands is in very good shape, and we would be happy to see it pass as-is. In particular, we hope that Sections 4, 5, and 6 remain unchanged.

Section 4 appropriates $800,000 to fund accelerated deployment of truly high-speed broadband in communities served by CUDs. This funding will indeed accelerate our construction projects, and in CVFiber's case, the speedup is on the order of several months. I suspect that the funds will help other newer CUDs even more.

Section 5 gives CUDs the power to approve line-extension projects in their member communities and Section 6 gives the same power to approve fiber-to-the-premises and fixed wireless installations. This is incredibly important in CVFiber's

case, as we have concretely identified several collections of locations from which to choose our pilot construction project. These collections of residences, businesses, and civic institutions were chosen in such a way that choosing to build any one of them would allow us to be financially secure over several years and therefore in a better position to pay back the VEDA fiber construction loans we will be seeking shortly. Line extensions into these projects could dramatically affect the number of people subscribing to our fiber service and consequently affect our future financial stability.

Lauren-Glenn Davitian from the CCTV Center for Media & Democracy recently submitted testimony suggesting that having better coordination for the broadband deployment strategy would be helpful. I agree and suggest two possible entities that could do that work: one is the Department of Public Service (DPS), which is the logical place in State government for this responsibility to lie, and the other would be the nascent Vermont Communications Union Districts Association (VCUDA), which is in the process of being formed by the five current Vermont CUDs and several forthcoming CUDs. Collectively, it is our goal to help Vermont get closer to its 2024 goal of bringing every Vermonter truly high-speed Internet access, and since we are public entities, we have direct accountability to the communities we serve. We also have the benefit of being autonomous from State government, having sprung up from the grassroots, and therefore only indirectly affected by political pressures. In any event, I think either DPS or VCUDA would be up to the task of coordinating the statewide deployment of future-proof broadband to *100%* of Vermonters.

Best regards,

Jeremy A. Hansen, Ph.D.
Chair, CVFiber Governing Board