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Main Street Alliance of Vermont

### **MSA-VT Mission & Vision**

Main Street Alliance of Vermont is a statewide network of over 700 small, locally-owned Vermont businesses. Our mission is to elevate the voices of small business owners on important public policy issues in Vermont. We are committed to bringing business owners to the table to engage in and develop policies that reflect the interconnected nature of small businesses and the communities they serve.

Vermont businesses are small and employ a significant percentage of the workforce: 90% of businesses in Vermont have fewer than 20 employees, and employ 28% of the workforce, while 98.5% of businesses in Vermont have fewer than 100 employees, and employ 62% of the workforce.<sup>1</sup> As a small business state, we believe we have an opportunity to pass policies that not only support the success of our workforce *or* the success of business but policies that - in tandem - support both.

We are working to make Vermont the best place to own and work for small businesses by creating conditions where small businesses, their employees, and their communities can thrive. Ensuring businesses and Vermonters throughout our state have access to reliable and affordable broadband internet service is an important step toward achieving this vision.

### **Small Business Roundtable Series:**

Over the past five years, MSA-VT has conducted in-person surveys with more than 1,000 small business owners in Vermont to learn about their perspectives on the economy, policy issues and business practices. In the fall, we held six roundtable discussions to hear directly from business owners about their challenges and ideas for policy change. They were held in Brattleboro, Bennington, St. Albans, St. Johnsbury, White River Junction, and Rutland. In total, there were 89 participants, of which 62 were local business owners from various industries, phases of growth and sizes. The remaining participants represented business groups, government, and non-profit organizations.

At these roundtables, business owners and entrepreneurs in each region discussed the need for improved access to internet and cell service to operate their businesses and attract and serve customers. Businesses expressed some of the challenges competing with other states - particularly bordering states - due to a lack of connectivity and called for expanding broadband as a way to build the tourism and recreation industry in Vermont's rural areas. Small business owners shared how our communities and businesses need broadband access for telecommuting/remote jobs and daily business operations such as credit card processing.

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<sup>1</sup> Vermont Department of Labor. ELMW Wages and Income. 2017



**How will H.513 impact Vermont's small businesses?**

We believe H.513 is an important step forward to ensuring small business owners, entrepreneurs, and community members have access to reliable, affordable broadband internet service.

Expanding broadband with a focus on Vermont's rural areas will improve the operations and productivity of our small businesses, create new opportunities for self-employed individuals and remote workers in rural areas, attract more businesses to Vermont, grow industries and allow our businesses to compete in national markets and with bordering states. Furthermore, Vermont's small businesses are inextricably tied to their local communities, and the health and wellbeing of their employees and people living in their communities can have a significant impact on our small businesses. Schools, health care providers, non-profit organizations and local and state government are turning to technology to deliver education, resources and support services, and our rural areas are at a disadvantage. Broadband expansion to unserved and underserved areas in Vermont is an investment in our small businesses, our economy and in the social infrastructure in our towns and villages.

**Summary:**

Vermont has a long history of entrepreneurship and small business growth. As a small state, smart public investments and economic development strategies directed at small businesses can have a lasting impact on the local economy and people living in all areas of the state. Vermont's small businesses play a unique role in their communities by offering economic activity, culture, jobs and often a central place for community members to come together. They, too, are community members and are invested in creating thriving downtowns and economic sustainability for our towns and villages.

Expanding broadband internet service will help build a state that works for small businesses and Vermonters who are working and living in our rural areas. It will grow our local economy, level the playing field for businesses, support the people who are living here and attract new young workers to the state. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony on behalf of MSA-VT.