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T E S T I M O N Y

To: House Committee on Energy and Technology
From: Sarah Buxton, Director of Workforce Development, Department of Labor
Date: January 27, 2021
Subject: Testimony Regarding Broadband Buildout Workforce Needs

This testimony outlines the functions of the Vermont Department of Labor's (VDOL) Workforce Development Division and offers suggestions on how to increase the number and skill level of workers available to support broadband expansion efforts.

I. Workforce Development Division – Background

The Vermont Department of Labor's (VDOL) mission is: *to promote and assist the economic growth and vitality of Vermont employers; to help Vermont businesses retain, create and attract new jobs; to ensure that every Vermonter can have a good-paying, secure job in a safe and healthy work environment; to train Vermonters to be a skilled and ready workforce to meet the challenges of the 21st century workplace and employers' hiring needs; to administer economic support, retraining and reemployment assistance to Vermonters who experience loss of their job or a workplace injury; and to provide vital and timely labor market information and analysis to the public, employers, workers, job seekers, lawmakers, researchers and planners to assist with strategic and successful decision making.*

The Workforce Development Division (WD) is one of VDOL's four main divisions. It provides employment services, training assistance, and job counseling, recruitment and placement assistance to businesses, jobseekers, and workers. There are roughly seventy positions that support the work of the division statewide. WD work is primarily funded with federal money that limits its use to specific activities and services. These programs include: Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Wagner-Peyser Employment Services, Jobs for Veterans Program, Foreign Labor Certification Program, Trade Adjustment Act, Work Opportunity Tax Credit Program, Registered Apprenticeship Program, and Individual Career Advancement Network (ICAN) Program. In addition, WD administers several state grants, including: Workforce Development Training Grants, Vermont Internship Program Grants,



Vermont Returnship Program Grants, Adult Career and Technical Education Grants, and the Vermont Youth Employment Program.

II. VDOL's Role in Workforce Expansion

Governor Scott has directed his administration focus on increasing the number and skill level of available workers in Vermont. To support that aim, the following strategies have been adopted:

- Increase the Labor Participation Rate of Vermonters
- Recruit and Relocate More Workers to Vermont
- Assist Employers in Accessing and Retaining Qualified Workers

WD focuses on two main customers: Jobseekers and Employers. Because our work is federally funded, the activities we conduct and support revolve around outcomes from services provided to these customers. To that end, when an industry or occupation specific initiative is before us, we ask three main questions:

1. How can we help *counsel and support* jobseekers in pursuing opportunities?
2. How can we *promote* job opportunities on behalf of employers?
3. How can we *connect* training providers, career counselors, support services, funding streams, and employers to *establish a robust talent pipeline*?

VDOL does not provide training directly. We strongly support recognized secondary and post-secondary education and training partners and focus our efforts on connecting, coordinating and matching so that individuals are successful in becoming employed in in-demand jobs.

III. Recommendations for Expanding Broadband Buildout Workforce

- VDOL is ready and willing to work with every employer in the industry to:
 - **Place jobseekers in paid (at VDOL's expense) work experiences or on-the-job training experiences,**
 - Post job listings (at no cost) on Vermont JobLink – the State's online job board that is used to search for jobs. It is also a mechanism for employers to allow their postings to be re-posted at no charge by other employment search engines,
 - Highlight employer and employment opportunities in one or more weekly virtual Job Fairs,
 - Feature employers and employment opportunities on our webpage and social media posts, and



- Refer jobseekers to open employment opportunities.
- VDOL is already working with VTC to fund and develop a pilot program to deliver basic, entry-level training for broadband installers. We would be willing to expand this pilot for a second round, if round one is successful. The current grant under development is \$10,000.
- VDOL can work with VTC to establish a “Broadband Installer” Registered Apprenticeship, which can become a primary recruitment and training mechanism for the industry. Once established, VDOL can work with secondary and post-secondary education partners to buildout career pathways leading into and out of this registered apprenticeship program. Further, as a federally recognized program, we can seek federal grants to support the launch and expansion of this work.

IV. Final Point

In our experience, workforce development and expansion in any industry is impossible without the full commitment of employers who are hiring. Employers must be available to work with education and training providers, state partners, and community organizations in developing, promoting, and administering the initiatives that will lead to successful outcomes. Without their input and partnership, we risk spending a great deal of money that yields little in return. If legislation advances that includes funds for workforce recruitment, training, or development, it should also include requirements that employers who stand to benefit be actively engaged in each step.

For follow-up questions, please feel free to contact me at Sarah.Buxton@vermont.gov.

