



February 9, 2023

Senator Ann Cummings
Chair, Senate Committee on Finance
115 State Street, Room 6
Montpelier, VT 05633

Dear Chair Cummings and Members of the Senate Committee on Finance:

As the Senate Committee on Finance continues to explore the topic of broadband and broadband affordability, I would like to take the opportunity to provide an overview of Comcast's operations and investments in Vermont, including critical affordability programs addressing digital equity in the state. I hope this information is helpful to you as your committee continues to seek opportunities that will help get all Vermonters connected to high-speed Internet.

Since entering Vermont in 2006, Comcast has constructed more than 1,800 miles of line extensions, which has resulted in the expansion of broadband service to thousands of Vermont residents and businesses. Customers in these areas can choose from multiple broadband service tiers, including a tier with 1.2 Gigabit service. In addition to current service locations, Comcast is continuing to construct network expansions throughout the state. Last year, Comcast completed projects in Elmore, Jamaica, Stratton, and Wardsboro. Currently, Comcast is in the process of network expansion projects in Eden, Elmore, and Wolcott and has committed to construct network expansions in Hubbardton, Sudbury, and Westmore in 2023.

In addition to private investment throughout the state, Comcast has also successfully partnered with the State of Vermont to expand broadband coverage in geographically difficult to serve areas. In recent years, Comcast has participated in the Connectivity Initiative and the Line Extension Customer Assistance Program (LECAP) administered by the Department of Public Service. Connectivity Initiative grants helped to facilitate construction of network expansion in Cavendish, Derby, Jericho, Norwich, and Swanton. Through LECAP alone, which was created in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and utilized federal CARES Act funds, Comcast was able to construct a total of 112-line extension projects, connecting an additional 308 customers throughout Vermont.

Internet Affordability

Internet Essentials and American Connectivity Program

While continuing to invest in network expansion, since 2011, Comcast has also prioritized the critical issue of connecting low-income families to the Internet through Internet Essentials, the most comprehensive and successful low-income broadband adoption program in the nation. Under this program, qualifying residential customers can obtain broadband service at speeds of up to 50 Mbps/10 Mbps for \$9.95/month, or speeds of up to 100 Mbps/20 Mbps for \$29.95/month with



Internet Essentials Plus (plus applicable taxes, fees and surcharges), as well as free digital skills training in person and online. Customers also have the option to purchase a low-cost Internet-ready computer and access digital literacy resources, including Internet basics; online safety and security; using the Internet for education, job searches, and tracking benefits; and building new skills.

Today, an individual may be eligible for Internet Essentials if they qualify for state or federal assistance programs, such as the National School Lunch Program, public housing assistance, Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (3SquaresVT), Supplemental Security Income, the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, or if they are enrolled or enrolling in ACP with Xfinity. More information regarding eligibility for Internet Essentials is available at www.internetessentials.com. Customers can apply for Internet Essentials and Internet Essentials Plus online, either by using a computer or mobile device, at www.internetessentials.com. Customers can also call 1-855-8-INTERNET (1-855-846-8376), between 8 a.m. and midnight (EST), seven days a week, to have an agent walk them through the application process. For those who are hearing impaired, American Sign Language support is available and the Internet Essentials website is compatible with screen readers used by individuals with visual impairments

Comcast is also proud to be an approved provider supporting the federal government's [Affordable Connectivity Program](#) (ACP). To date, ACP has connected over 11.5 million households. Under the ACP program, qualifying customers may apply a credit of up to \$30 per month (\$75 per month in Tribal lands) to any Xfinity Internet service tier. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Comcast participated in the federal Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) program as well as the Vermont COVID-19 Temporary Broadband Subsidy, which was administered by the Department of Public Service. Both of these programs helped to keep Vermonters connected to the Internet during a critical time.

Comcast has continued a commitment it made in 2011 to keep its Internet Essentials price at \$9.95 a month. With the introduction of Internet Essentials Plus referenced above, customers on both Internet Essentials tiers would effectively have their entire broadband bill covered by the federal ACP credit. If a portion of the ACP credit remains after the credit is applied to the customer's broadband bill, a customer who has Xfinity Mobile can apply the amount of the remaining portion of the Federal ACP credit to the cost of a line of Unlimited Xfinity Mobile service.

Since launching in 2011, Comcast has made dozens of improvements to the Internet Essentials program, including expanding eligibility 14 times—bringing Internet Essentials to new audiences such as public housing residents, income constrained veterans, seniors, and even community college students. Comcast has a history of increasing speeds and enhancing its Internet Essentials program and anticipates continuing to do so in the future.

Lift Zones

As part of Comcast's ongoing commitment to help connect underserved families to the Internet, Comcast launched a new effort during the pandemic to create WiFi-connected "Lift Zones" in community centers nationwide. Here in Vermont, we partnered with four organizations to create



Lift Zones – Spectrum Youth and Family Services in Burlington, Boys & Girls Club in Burlington, Dodge House in Rutland and the Boys & Girls Club in Brattleboro. Lift Zones, which provide internet access on-the-go, complement our Internet Essentials program that provides in-home broadband connectivity. Lift Zones help students who, for a variety of reasons (including homelessness, or housing insecurity issues), need somewhere to go to fully participate in their education.

Community Impact Giving

Since 2020, Comcast has contributed more than \$1.5 million in cash and in-kind support to help local Vermont nonprofits achieve their mission. Our partners include, Easterseals Vermont, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Vermont, Boys and Girls Clubs of Brattleboro, Burlington and Rutland, Mentor Vermont, Mercy Connections, Outright Vermont, Spectrum Youth and Family Services, Dodge House, Technology for Tomorrow, Vermont Foodbank and the United Way.

Foundation Grants for Digital Literacy

Another way that Comcast promotes digital literacy is through Comcast Foundation grants. In Vermont, Technology for Tomorrow recently received a \$15,000 Comcast Foundation grant which will be used to support their technology education programs. The Boys & Girls Club of Burlington and the Boys & Girls Club of Brattleboro have also received Comcast Foundation grants to support their digital literacy programs.

Project UP

In 2022, Comcast launched Project UP. Project UP is Comcast’s comprehensive initiative to advance digital equity and to help build a future of unlimited possibilities. This initiative is backed by a \$1 billion commitment over 10 years and will reach tens of millions of people.

Comcast’s Network

While ensuring Comcast customers in Vermont have affordable options for high-speed Internet, customers in the state also have access to one of the fastest and most reliable high-speed broadband networks in the country. In fact, Comcast operates one of the largest fiber deployments in the nation. In addition to an all-fiber backbone that connects cities coast-to-coast, Comcast has consistently added and expanded fiber throughout the portion of its network that serves customers directly (called the “access” network). Comcast has extended its fiber facilities ever-closer to customers’ homes, including numerous fiber-to-the-home (FTTH) and fiber-to-the-premise (FTTP) deployments delivering Comcast’s full range of services to both commercial and residential customers. Comcast’s fiber network is continuously monitored and protected by proprietary, internally developed artificial intelligence and machine learning technologies that can automatically detect issues like fiber tears, and dramatically reduce the estimated time to repair. In a world where fiber cuts and tears are a daily experience across the country, smart AI that detects and mitigates such incidents can mean the difference between customers being offline for a few minutes or several hours.



Comcast engineers know that laying fiber in the ground is only the beginning of delivering reliable service to customers, not the end. Comcast network engineers, software developers and AI scientists leverage the company's extensive background in software development and machine learning to continuously build, deploy and evolve tools that continuously monitor, adjust and improve network performance at every level. This technology is closely linked to Comcast's multi-year work to digitize and virtualize its network, which not only improves performance, but vastly increases visibility into the network.

Comcast's significant ongoing network and technology investments enable it to continually deliver innovative and scalable products and services that keep residents and business on the cutting edge and enable it to meet evolving community demands. During the COVID-19 pandemic when Internet traffic spiked more than 30%, Comcast's network continued to deliver fast speeds, even under the heaviest usage, and even in the areas most severely affected by the pandemic.

The above information is a snapshot of the work and investments Comcast is making in Vermont every day. I hope this information is helpful to the Environment and Energy Committee as you continue to explore broadband policy and ways to ensure every Vermonter has access to high-speed Internet. Further information on [Internet Essentials](#), [Internet Essentials Plus](#), and [Project UP](#) can be found using the links and in the attachments to this letter. Complimentary Internet Essentials program materials and resources are also available through the partner portal on the Internet Essentials website and program materials are available in multiple languages.

I appreciate your review of this material. If you have any questions or would like to discuss Comcast's investment in Vermont and efforts to close the digital divide, please feel free to contact me at 978-995-0868 or kristin_christopher@comcast.com.

Sincerely,

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Cc: Senate Committee on Finance