

Written Testimony of Sheila Duranleau

Submitted January 20, 2026

House Committee on Energy and Digital Infrastructure: H.527

Senate Finance Committee: S.159

My name is Sheila Duranleau, and I am a resident of Washington, Vermont and the Chair of the Washington Selectboard. I am writing today to strongly oppose H.527/S.159.

While §248a was originally enacted as a temporary, streamlined process for telecommunications siting, it has evolved into a permanent bypass of municipal authority. Extending the sunset yet again continues to erode the ability of Vermont towns to determine the character and future of their own communities.

Washington fully supports reliable telecommunications infrastructure but not at the expense of local governance. In fact, we proactively reached out to Verizon—through the Department of Public Service—to initiate a collaborative discussion about siting a tower in a location that would work for both the Town and the provider. We never received a response. This lack of engagement is deeply concerning given the long-term impact such a project would have on our residents and our village center.

The proposed tower site is located within our village historic district, as designated by our zoning board and listed as a registered historic place by the State of Vermont. The tower would rise 60–70 feet above the tree line, making it visible from multiple points throughout the village and from higher elevations in the surrounding valley.

As one approaches our village—lined with 200-year-old homes and 175-year-old church spires—this tower would dominate the landscape. It would be visible from six historic sites in town. The visual impact on our quiet, rural, historic village would be profound and lasting.

The current §248a process places an extraordinary burden on small towns while offering limited procedural protections or meaningful opportunities for participation, even when the impacts are highly localized. Washington is a small community and selectboard members are all employed in addition to their service to the town, no administrative staff, and a town clerk who works three days a week. Our first Advance Notice, dated October 9, 2024, was addressed to me as Chair but sent to the Town Hall. I did not see it for several days. When I requested a modest extension to the 60-day response window—so we could call a special meeting, gather community input, and prepare a thoughtful response—the request was denied.

Several agencies raised substantive concerns that, to the best of my knowledge, were never addressed:

- October 15, 2024: ANR Source Water Protection Specialist Laura Ranker identified risks to the Zone 2 Source Protection Area, noting that the SPA was not shown on project drawings and recommending steps to prevent contamination of the public water supply.

- December 5, 2024: The Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission submitted a letter outlining four areas of concern.

At our February 11, 2025 public meeting, the applicant was unable to answer basic questions about coverage, service range, expansion plans, or the disappearance of previous service. The slide deck was unreadable, and when residents attempted to raise concerns about health impacts, the meeting was abruptly shut down. Community members left frustrated, unheard, and uninformed.

The first Advance Notice expired without any communication regarding future intent. The second, filed April 15, 2025, also expired on October 13, 2025—again with no discussion and no explanation. This pattern of entering a small community, withdrawing, returning, and withdrawing again—without transparency—creates distrust and leaves local officials unable to answer residents' questions.

The ePUC website is difficult to navigate, and I struggled to determine where filings should be submitted. I was ultimately able to file a Selectboard response, but only at the last minute.

Throughout both filings, I spoke several times with James Porter at DPS. He offered to reach out to Verizon to suggest a facilitated conversation between Washington and Marshfield—both towns were open to improved service but wanted to participate in identifying appropriate locations. To my knowledge, Verizon never responded, and no such conversation occurred.

The §248a process, as it currently functions, is opaque, confusing, and structurally biased against small towns. It leaves communities with little recourse, little information, and little ability to protect their historic, environmental, and civic assets.

I respectfully urge the Committee to consider reforms that require true communication, transparency, and partnership between telecommunications providers and the Vermont communities they seek to serve. Reliable service is important—but it should not come at the cost of local voice, local character, or local governance.

Thank you for your time, for considering my testimony and for your service to the people of Vermont.

Sheila Duranleau
Chair, Washington Selectboard
Washington, Vermont