

US House of Representatives: Committee on Small Business

Rural Development, Agriculture, Trade, and Entrepreneurship Subcommittee

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Gettysburg, PA

Madam Chairwoman Finkenauer and Ranking Member Joyce as well the other members of the sub-committee, I am grateful for the opportunity to provide testimony today given the correlation of broadband technology to economic development. My name is Mike Ross, and I am President of the Franklin County Area Development Corporation (FCADC). As a matter of background, the FCADC is a 501(c) 6 private non-profit corporation charged with formulating, implementing, and promoting a comprehensive Franklin County-wide economic development strategy that nourishes planned growth and family sustainable employment opportunities. The strategy is based on the retention/expansion of existing companies, the selective attraction of new industries, and the start-up of new businesses. Over the past 33 years, our office has helped with 765 projects that have facilitated more than \$2 Billion of new capital investments in Franklin County via more than \$325 Million of direct economic development resources. This investment has resulted in the creation/retention of more than 50,000 jobs.

Franklin County is among the fastest growing counties in the state. Strategically located along the Interstate 81 corridor with easy access to Interstates 78, 76 and 70, the County is within a one day's drive of 50% of the North American population, including the major population centers in the mid-west and northeast. Additionally, Franklin County is within 75 minutes of the Port of Baltimore and three hours from the Port of Philadelphia. When combined with two class one intermodal terminals, Franklin County is an ideal location for myriad industries including manufacturing, transportation, logistics, and defense. To date, Target Distribution Center, Ulta, Inc., Staples Distribution, Food Lion Distribution, Ingram Book Company, and Procter & Gamble have all established warehousing/distribution centers in the County. Franklin County is also home to manufacturers such as Manitowoc Crane Group, Volvo Construction Equipment, JLG Industries, Epiroc Drilling Tools, Johnson Controls, CAM Superline a Novae Corporation, and Jamison Door – BMP, as well as the Letterkenny Army Depot, to name a few.

In addition, Franklin County is among the top 5 agricultural producing counties in the Commonwealth.

Infrastructure is the foundation of economic development. Retaining, attracting, and/or supporting the start-up of quality employers requires the availability of a full range of public utilities, including telecommunications and broadband technology. I have often remarked that economic development is not possible unless you can flush a toilet. The same can be true for broadband internet. Broadband needs to be considered part of our national public infrastructure, just like roads, water, sewer, ports, airports, rail networks, and a reliable electric grid.

To state the obvious, we live in a globally connected economy and for our companies to effectively compete, especially those in rural America, they need to have high-speed internet and broadband connectivity. The transfer of medical and technical documents, fabrication drawings, and video conferencing **requires** high-speed internet and broadband connectivity. As I mentioned previously, Franklin County is home to some of the most widely recognized manufacturers in the world, and their ability to connect to their other locations, is critical. Moreover, as our national conversation has shifted to the importance of education and workforce development, to include online and distance learning, high-speed internet is essential.

As it stands now, the lack of broadband capacity in rural settings creates a disparity in educational opportunities and outcomes. According to a June 2019 report from the Center for Rural PA entitled "*Broadband Availability and Access in Rural Pennsylvania*", over 800,000 Pennsylvanians do not have access to FCC levels of broadband connectivity, classified as download speeds of a minimum 25 mbps.

- Locally our median download speeds are abysmal...according to the report:
 - Franklin 12 mbps (home of Manitowoc Crane, VCE, JLG assembly & engineering operations, Penn State Mont Alto, Wilson College)
 - Adams 5.9 mbps
 - Fulton 5.9 mbps (headquarters of JLG Industries)
 - Perry 6.0 mbps
 - Blair 14 mbps
 - Cumberland 9.3 mbps (Shippensburg University and Dickinson College)

It is important to note that Governor Wolf in collaboration with the Pennsylvania Legislature has created a bipartisan *Broadband Initiative* whose goal is to address the challenges faced by rural Pennsylvania. Launched in March 2018, the Pennsylvania Broadband Investment Incentive Program made available \$35 Million in financial assistance to private providers by bidding on service areas within Pennsylvania in the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in the Connect America Fund II Auction. Any provider participating in Pennsylvania's incentive program was required to exceed the FCC's requirements and to meet the Governor's goal of providing 100 mbps or more service by June 2022.

To recap, the availability of high-speed broadband internet in rural America is **CRITICAL** to a vibrant, growing economy and of a highly skilled workforce that is prepared to compete in an ever-expanding global economy. Again, thank you for the opportunity to testify.