

From the Office of the President & CEO

Fiber Broadband Association
3050 K Street NW, Suite 400
Washington, DC 20007, USA

January 21, 2026

The Honorable Roger Williams

Chair

Committee on Small Business
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jake Ellzey

Chair

Subcommittee on Rural Development, Energy, and
Supply Chains
Committee on Small Business
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nydia Velázquez

Ranking Member

Committee on Small Business
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kelly Morrison

Ranking Member

Subcommittee on Rural Development, Energy, and
Supply Chains
Committee on Small Business
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Letter for the Record, January 21, 2026, Subcommittee Hearing: “*Empowering Rural America Through Investment in Innovation*”

Dear Chairs Williams and Ellzey and Ranking Members Velázquez and Morrison,

The **Fiber Broadband Association (FBA)** is the nation’s largest and only trade association representing the full fiber broadband ecosystem, including service providers, manufacturers, industry experts, and deployment specialists. FBA appreciates the Subcommittee’s focus on how investment in innovation can strengthen rural economies. For rural small businesses, access to modern, high-capacity broadband infrastructure increasingly determines whether innovation is possible at all. As essential services move online and technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) reshape commerce, agriculture, health care, and education, **reliable fiber connectivity is no longer optional – it is a prerequisite for economic participation, and U.S. competitiveness.**

For rural communities, the stakes are significant. As AI becomes foundational to both the economy and national security, data computation and high throughput reliable communications capacity are central to economic competitiveness. Fiber is the only broadband infrastructure capable of meeting the bandwidth, latency, and reliability requirements of advanced computing at scale. It is physically superior to all other methods of transmission technologies and remains the only scalable pathway for transporting the massive volumes of data required by AI systems. Even the most advanced semiconductors, power generation, and cloud architecture cannot deliver their full economic value without sufficient underlying

connectivity. Simply put, **AI cannot scale without fiber, and U.S. leadership in AI depends on the strength and reach of America’s fiber networks.**¹

This reliance is becoming increasingly evident as AI-driven data centers place unprecedented demands on national infrastructure. Facilities optimized for Large Language Models (LLMs) require dramatically higher optical connectivity – often several times greater than traditional hyperscale data centers. While urban data center markets face growing constraints related to land availability, power access, and construction timelines, fiber remains the most scalable input. Without accelerated fiber deployment, the United States risks creating a structural bottleneck that slows AI development, increases costs, and widens geographic disparities in who benefits from the innovation economy.²

At the same time, **this challenge presents a significant opportunity for rural America.** Rural broadband providers and electric cooperatives already possess many of the assets needed to support distributed computing, including extensive fiber routes, accessible land, established power relationships, and deep community trust. These strengths position rural providers as valuable partners in expanding national digital capacity, particularly as the growing data-processing demands require more distributed and resilient infrastructure across regions. Leveraging existing rural infrastructure allows new facilities and technology upgrades to be deployed more efficiently, creating stable revenue opportunities for rural providers while strengthening the resilience of the nation’s broader technological ecosystem.³

The benefits of fiber deployment extend well beyond infrastructure. High-capacity, symmetrical fiber networks improve quality of life and economic performance in rural communities by enabling reliable access to telehealth, remote education, cloud-based services, precision agriculture, and AI-enabled workforce training. The economic evidence is clear: rural communities with high broadband adoption consistently outperform those with limited access. Studies shows that rural counties with robust broadband use experience more than **200 percent higher business growth, 44 percent higher GDP growth, and 18 percent higher per-capita income growth** than similarly situated counties with low adoption.⁴ These communities also see higher rates of self-employment, reflecting broadband’s role in lowering barriers to entrepreneurship and expanding market access for small businesses. In Beltrami County, Minnesota, for example, near universal fiber access has supported rapid business expansion,

¹ Cresse, P. (2025, February). *Accelerating AI With Fiber: Systems and Strategies*. Fiber Broadband Association

² *Id*

³ Fiber Broadband Association Middle Mile Working Group. (2025, November). *Opportunities for Rural Providers in the Age of Distributed AI and Edge Compute*.

⁴ Weinstein, A., Erouart, M., & Dewbury, A. (2025, May). *Beyond Connectivity: The Role of Broadband in Rural Economic Growth and Resilience*. Center on Rural Innovation, at 3.




including one aviation manufacturer that grew from \$400,000 to \$4 million in annual revenue, while the broader local economy outperformed state and national trends. Conversely, communities lacking adequate broadband infrastructure experience higher business closures, job losses, population decline, and long-term economic stagnation.⁵

The policy implications are clear. If Congress seeks to support rural innovation, small business growth, and workforce opportunity, it must ensure that fiber deployment keeps pace with national demand. This includes permitting reform, streamlined access to rights-of-way and public lands, capital-friendly deployment policies, and modern investment frameworks that provide regulatory certainty and support long-term infrastructure financing. The scale of the challenge is substantial: by 2029, the U.S. is projected to require nearly twice the amount of long-haul fiber mileage currently deployed to support anticipated AI demand.⁶ Meeting this need will require intentional policy choices, predictable funding environments, and a regulatory approach aligned with the realities of AI-era infrastructure.

FBA urges the Subcommittee to recognize that **fiber policy is economic policy, rural policy, and AI policy**. Strategic investment in fiber accelerates small business competitiveness, strengthens supply chains, expands workforce participation, reduces geographic inequality, and ensures that rural communities are not left behind as AI becomes central to American innovation. Rural America has the assets, expertise, and willingness to lead – but it requires infrastructure that match that ambition.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony for the record and for the Subcommittee and Full Committee’s continued commitment to ensuring that the benefits of American innovation reach every community.

Sincerely,



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President and CEO

Fiber Broadband Association

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⁵ *Id.*

⁶ Fiber Broadband Association. (2025, June). *The Underappreciated Need to Enable AI and Data Center Growth: Increased and More Strategic Fiber Interconnections.*

