

May 24, 2021

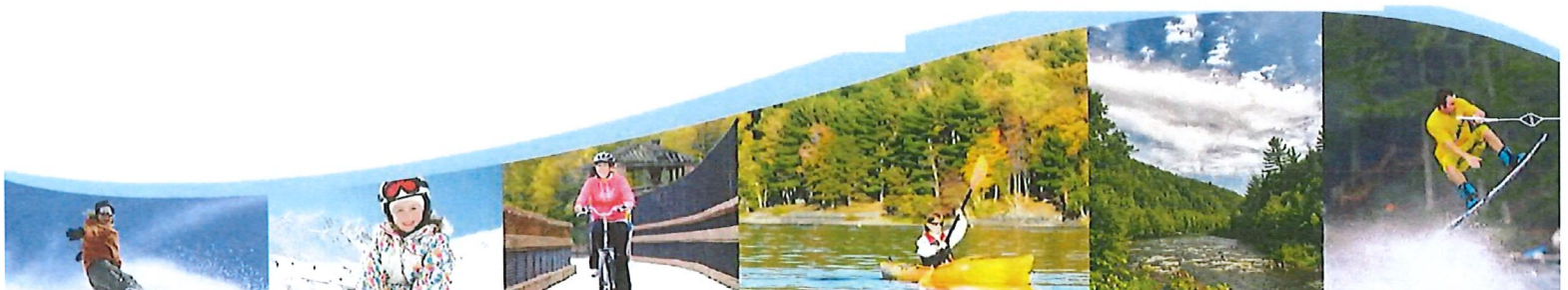
House Consumer Affairs Committee
Re: Telecommunications Deployment in Pennsylvania

Majority Chair Rep. Jim Marshall,
Minority Chair Rep. Robert Matzie,
Committee members, committee staff and fellow Pennsylvanians,

It is time for our Commonwealth to expand upon as well as improve upon the connectivity our citizens and visitors require in order to meet the challenges we face amidst a pandemic such as COVID-19. Nothing has exacerbated that need more than the dependence upon high bandwidth data connections at home and at remote locations than the past year and nowhere has it been more evident than in the Poconos, a destination that proved to be a refuge in a storm for hundreds of thousands of part-time and now full-time residents in our four-county region.

Real estate transactions have boomed in 2020 as well as 2021 placing a strain on the already dated telecom infrastructure we have in place across mostly rural terrain. Longtime and first-time visitors to the Poconos have now laid stake to the region for both their professional needs including remote work and relocation as well as their personal lives through investment in second or primary residences. Remote learning and telemedicine have also become far more common ways people in the Poconos operate and it is unlikely that will go back entirely to the way it was before 2020. This growth has taken place with the same wireless data infrastructure we have had since the time you could first stream movies and music to your mobile device, provided you had a strong signal. And while that has been barely adequate for our changing times, it soon will be far from the infrastructure necessary to sustain a 5G future.

As a leader of an organization that relies on connectivity with our members, our visitors and our communities, so too does our future depend on connectivity in an ever-evolving digital landscape. The tech sector along with telecommunications and infrastructure companies have been working together for years to make 5G technology the standard bearer across the Commonwealth. Progress in deploying small cell infrastructure in Pennsylvania has been slower than in other states however because the Commonwealth hasn't adopted a statewide regulatory framework.



Just think: there are more mobile devices in the U.S. right now than there are people. Those mobile devices and their users have more than doubled the increase of data traffic in two years. As destination marketers and stewards of our communities, the Pocono Mountains Visitors Bureau wholeheartedly supports the expansion of 5G and small cell wireless infrastructure in Pennsylvania. Our 28 million visitors each year rely heavily on data connectivity for directions, booking stays at lodging properties, as well as arranging meals and memorable experiences throughout Wayne, Pike, Monroe and Carbon counties each of the four seasons.

Currently, Pennsylvania lags behind other states in this endeavor to create a regulatory framework that is amenable to development. Our neighbor, Ohio, moved quickly to foster small cell deployment giving the state and its industries, citizens and visitors a head start on the coming benefits from 5G technology. Enacting laws and simplifying the ways these telecom deployments can be executed across municipal lines will not only let us keep pace with other states, but also provide the commonsense approach to governing technology that our electorate so desperately desires.

If Pennsylvania is not on the forefront of 5G wireless infrastructure **today**, then each of us in the Keystone State could find ourselves at the back of the 5G line **tomorrow**. The benefits 5G will bring to our region and our Commonwealth cannot be understated. That is why, on behalf of 450 members in a \$3.3 billion/year hospitality and tourism industry here, I implore each of you to consider advancing legislation that:

- streamlines the permitting process for small cell deployment,
- creates a simplistic fee structure,
- considers how townships, boroughs and cities can maintain their charm while incorporating this next-gen telecommunications into their communities,
- boosts economic development initiatives in our regions by encouraging private investment.

Thank you for your time and for the opportunity to make the case for this predictable and uniform approach to regulating telecommunications that have the ability to transform lives and communities for generations to come.



Chris Barrett – President/CEO
Pocono Mountains Visitors Bureau