



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

George M. Borrello

Broadband Expansion Plan for Southern Tier of Western New York

GEORGE M. BORRELLO December 3, 2020

| ISSUE: **RURAL COMMUNITIES, BROADBAND ACCESS**



LITTLE VALLEY, N.Y. – State Senator George M. Borrello, 57th District, and Assemblyman Joseph M. Giglio, 148th District, were joined by Patrick Coughlin, Chief Development Officer of FirstLight Fiber, and local officials to announce a plan to expand broadband access across Allegany, Cattaraugus and Chautauqua counties.

Senator Borrello and Assemblyman Giglio said broadband access is the key to the region's future. In researching possible avenues to expand high-speed internet access, they

discovered that FirstLight Fiber owns a major fiber optic line, the Southern Tier Fiber Backbone, that could fast-track their efforts. Following discussions with FirstLight representatives, the company pledged to work with local officials and regional broadband providers to expand access to the line.

Already in use by several local governments and schools, the 115-mile fiber optic line runs from Whitesville in Allegany County to Jamestown in Chautauqua County, passing through Wellsville, Olean, Cuba, Little Valley and Randolph. The line was built between 2009 and 2013 by ION Communications, a company acquired by FirstLight in 2017. ION built the line after receiving a \$39.7 million federal stimulus grant to expand broadband in New York, Pennsylvania and Vermont.

“I want to thank FirstLight for coming to the table and working with us. This partnership promises to bring high-speed internet access to homes and businesses across the region,” Senator Borrello said. “Broadband access is critical to our economy, to the education of our children and the success of our communities. The pandemic highlighted the inequities a lack of broadband service creates in rural communities. As schools moved online, many parents were forced to drive their children to library or restaurant parking lots to access Wi-Fi connections. That’s unacceptable.”

“Bringing broadband to our rural communities today is as critical as the electrification of rural America was in the early 20th Century. In order for our children, our residents and industries to compete with their peers on the world stage, they need access to broadband internet,” he added.

Assemblyman Giglio said because FirstLight’s fiber-optic line is readily available, the

partnership can speed that access to high-speed internet.

“The revelation of this resource is a major breakthrough in getting high-speed internet access to the people who need it the most – students and businesses who rely on people working from home – and it’s been sitting right in our front yard,” Assemblyman Giglio said. “We have worked long and hard to try to ensure that everyone has broadband access in our communities. We believe this is a major move forward in accomplishing that goal.”

“Providing reliable, quality fiber-based connectivity to underserved regions throughout the Northeast remains a priority at FirstLight,” said Patrick Coughlin, Chief Development Officer at FirstLight. “In our digital economy, access to broadband is vital to success, and FirstLight is proud to work with the state of New York to help extend these essential services to the communities who need them.”

Allegany County and Cattaraugus County have applied for Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) funding to increase access to reliable, high-speed and affordable internet access.

Allegany County Board of Legislators Chairman Curt Crandall said the partnership with FirstLight is welcome news.

“Expansion of broadband in Allegany County and other rural counties in New York State is extremely important for our future,” he said. “Especially now, with COVID, the need for broadband access is imperative. People need it to work from home and students need it to study from home. We welcome any expansion of broadband access FirstLight is able to achieve for the benefit of our community.”

Cattaraugus County Legislature Chairman Howard VanRensselaer Sr. said access to the next generation of internet technology is critical.

“This is extremely important to our community. It’s important for our economy and the education of our students,” Chairman VanRensselaer said. “We have many areas in the county that are still not connected and we have been working to expand access to broadband for many years. This is a welcome development. We need broadband access to move forward.”

Senator Borrello noted that while the state claims that the \$500 million Broadband for All program has expanded connectivity to 98 percent of the population, that figure is widely acknowledged to be extremely inaccurate. A recent independent [report](#) found that 726,000 K-12 students in the state lacked access during the pandemic – 27 percent of all students.

“Our homes have become our workplaces and our classrooms,” Senator Borrello said. “Now more than ever, we need to close the digital divide to make sure rural New Yorkers aren’t left behind economically, socially and educationally. By working with providers like FirstLight and our partners in county government, we can make sure that doesn’t happen.”

Senator George Borrello represents the 57th District, which includes Allegany, Cattaraugus and Chautauqua counties and part of Livingston County. For more information, please visit [Senator Borrello’s Website](#).

Assemblyman Joseph Giglio represents the 148th District, which consists of all of Cattaraugus and Allegany counties and portions of Steuben County. For more information, visit [Assemblyman Giglio’s Official Website](#).

The entire press conference can be viewed on Senator Borrello’s Facebook page at:

@senatorgeorgeborrello

###