

Written Testimony of Bryant Dillon

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New York State Legislative Commission on Rural Resources

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Good afternoon. My name is Bryant Dillon and I am the General Manager for Steuben Rural Electric, located in Bath, New York. Steuben Rural Electric provides electric distribution service to over 6,300 homes, farms and small businesses in 4 counties. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify on this very important topic and the significant impact that it has had on the rural communities that we serve.

First, I would like to offer my sincere appreciation and applaud policymakers for the work that is being done to address broadband deployment in rural territories located in New York State. Many rural areas across the nation have been left behind and New York is making significant strides in closing the digital divide in rural communities. Today, access to affordable high-speed broadband is not only a luxury, it is a necessity. Many of our communities will see numerous benefits, both socially and economically. In addition, expanding New York's digital footprint will also enhance the Cooperative's ability to deploy smart grid resources, further benefiting the members we serve.

At Steuben Rural Electric, we have been working closely with telecommunication companies to make our infrastructure available, with as little barriers to entry and as safely as possible. Between all phases of the New York Broadband Program, approximately 3,000 of our unserved or underserved members will now have access to high speed broadband. Time constraints set forth have posed a significant challenge, but we have dedicated most of our resources and manpower available to accomplishing the tasks in the most efficient manner, as we understand the magnitude of its importance.

As many of you are aware, the conditions of the Charter Settlement Agreement required Charter to expand its footprint in rural territories. As such, we received numerous applications for pole attachment licenses from Charter, many of which overlapped geographical regions covered by the New York State Broadband Program. This approach appeared to be counterproductive to the goal of expanding broadband in rural communities. Charter has since withdrawn most of these applications and has not submitted any further requests to date. Regardless of future plans, it would be a sensible approach to require Charter to build to locations that are unserved or only have satellite service available. At the very least, I feel that consideration should be given to overlapping coverage areas and should not count towards Charter's obligation to serve rural communities. We are aware that this concern is being addressed and hope that it continues to be monitored in order to pursue the most efficient expansion of broadband coverage.

As all parties work towards the common goal, it is crucial that we also take a look at the technologies that we are investing in. Throughout many of our rural service territories, we noted that a substantial number of census blocks were awarded investments for satellite service. It is my opinion that these valuable resources need to be targeted towards more resilient technologies. Reliable solutions must be available to our constituents in order to provide equal opportunities for education, safety resources and opportunities for economic development. Satellite internet coverage is greatly dependent on weather, which can restrict access for lengthy periods of time. In addition to weather, satellite internet also presents latency issues and often comes with bandwidth limitations. We would encourage that these outdated technologies be excluded from future state or federal programs.

In closing, I would like to reiterate the profound impact that the expansion of broadband will have on our rural communities. Without the support of policy makers, this would make the tasks at hand even more challenging. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to share our experience and hope that New York State's Rural Electric Cooperatives can continue to be a trusted resource to policymakers on these very important issues. Rural Electric Cooperatives understand what it means to expand services in order to enhance the quality of life in disadvantaged communities that are often difficult to deploy infrastructure.