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September 3, 2019

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the proposed “Small Business Last Mile Act of 2019”. My name is Tim McAfee and I am the CEO and Engineer for Pioneer Broadband, a small Internet Service Provider in Aroostook and Washington Counties in the state of Maine.

Connecting small businesses to the web is extremely important in today’s economy. The marketplace has changed. Consumers want products at the touch of a button, and producers want to get their wares to market as soon as possible. As communication technology has evolved over the last 20 years, there are plenty of spots throughout our great state, and country for that matter, that lack sufficient broadband access. Things like telecommuting, telehealth, and digital content creation are becoming more mainstream. We live in a beautiful state; a wholesome place to raise a family.

Our company started out as a wireless company in the early 2000s. We have since migrated our focus to all fiber optic networking. We have done this because the wireless and copper technologies have not kept up with the consumer demand. Our customers want fast, reliable Internet access. Whether it is for business or pleasure, that is what our society is demanding. The Internet of Things is growing exponentially. Connected devices are the norm, whether it is a toaster, a car wash, or a vehicle. We have embraced the technology as users but have overlooked the aspect of infrastructure.

At Pioneer Broadband, we love providing fiber optic service to a small businesses in a rural setting. We will do it whenever we can, but there is true expense to doing so. It costs tens of thousands of dollars per mile to build fiber. We cannot always make a business case to deliver. If the customer cannot afford to pay for the build, we will try to find a grant source that fits. The ConnectME Authority has been instrumental in connecting various communities in our coverage area and we applaud their efforts.

Existing federal grant programs are very difficult to obtain. The intentions are good, but they are not designed for every situation. They do not always make sense either. For example, the USDA Community Connect Grant will pay for construction of a network to every home but requires the operator to build and staff a community center with computers and Internet access. Another example is the CAF II program. It is only available to ILECs. They are using the CAF funds to install DSL rollouts on their copper infrastructure. That seems like a complete waste of money to me. That money should be put into FTTx infrastructure. That is what will benefit the consumer.

I appreciate the focus of this Act. It is designed to make it easier for a small, rural business, to get connected. It is focused on fiber as a medium. I am, however, concerned about the meanings

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of the following phrases: “duplicate infrastructure” and “functional equivalent”. These phrases look like good ways to attempt circumvention of the Act’s intent.

Again, I thank you for the opportunity to testify and look forward to the successful progression of this proposed bill.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Timothy R. McAfee". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent initial 'T' and a long, sweeping underline.

Timothy R. McAfee