

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

My name is Mark Ouellette and I am the President and CEO of Axiom Technologies. Axiom is a full-service internet service provider and professional services company based right here in Machias. From our founder's roots and the first wireless internet connection in Washington County 14 plus years ago, our mission has not changed:

To deliver strategic and customized rural broadband deployment solutions to remote customers and communities across Maine.

Axiom currently serves over 1300 homes and small businesses across Washington County, and several islands along the Maine coast. I don't think it is an understatement to say we serve some of the most difficult customers to reach, in some of the most challenging and remote terrain in the United States.

Axiom has deep experience with all internet technology; wireless- including TV White Space, DSL and fiber.

We work hard to deliver innovative solutions that work- at a cost that makes sense to the subscriber.

Over the years, how people use the internet, especially in rural Maine has evolved and become critical to small and home-based businesses, and increasingly to people who can work from anywhere and choose to live in rural Maine for the quality of life. Education, telemedicine, teleconferencing, entertainment, and phone service are increasingly reliant on a strong, reliable internet connection and enable remote, rural customers to connect to the world, create their own economy and successfully preserve their way of life. Internet connectivity can help save rural commutes from dying.

In Maine, numbers are difficult, but estimates suggest there remains 20,000 unserved homes and 10s of thousands of underserved homes. Most of rural Maine struggles to reach the FCC standard of 25/3Mbps.

And for Maine's rural businesses, lack of robust connectivity is increasingly impeding growth. Fiber- the gold standard of connectivity- remains difficult for many rural small businesses to access or afford, Many businesses have been disappointed to learn that the cost of a fiber connection is out of reach, even if they have access to that type of connection- often costing between \$2,000 and \$10,000 depending on the location of the fiber connection point- and this is the cost before the monthly subscriber fees, which often run over \$100/month.

Affordability is a significant barrier for small rural businesses to connect and obtain better speeds and reliability. Accessing on-line, cloud-based tools like QuickBooks or Zoom, with a less than optimal connection at the very least has productivity consequences and can prevent the ability of a small business to access these tools at all.

Every person deserves to be connected. Every business needs a level of speed and reliability that allows them to succeed in an increasingly digital economy.

In a rural state like Maine, residential connections are often a business connection, increasingly rural Maine is working from home for themselves or remotely for companies located across the United States.

The Digital Divide is increasing- giving urban areas better access, reliability and speeds, while the rural areas continue to lag behind. Government programs like the USDA Reconnect Program and the Department of Commerce, EDA are helpful, but more needs to be done to ensure the vibrancy and productivity of rural America. No internet service provider can affordably serve rural homes- without federal, state or local subsidy.

There is no doubt in my mind that the lack of good Broadband internet in rural Maine is creating an economic lag on the economy.

In summary I'll make 5 points:

1. Equal access to all- All small businesses are not created equally- a job created or retained in a rural community can have an oversized impact
2. Futureproof- fiber optic systems can deliver a Gig (1000Mbps) to each location and inexpensive new technology is being developed to deliver 10,000Mbps to a single location- the government should stop investing in outdated and unscalable technology
3. Congress should ensure that connectivity should not be dictated by the location of your home or small business- rural connectivity is extremely important and policy decisions in Washington, should not exacerbate the urban/rural divide
4. Reliability- nothing is more frustrating to any of us then when the internet is not working- as the committee considers investments- please strongly consider the reliability of various technologies- there is broad agreement that fiber delivers the best reliability
5. Last, bridging the Digital Divide requires more than a good connection- it requires educating subscribers how to leverage their connection through Digital Literacy teaching and classes, Axiom's founder has created the National Digital Equity Center whose mission is ensure that all citizens have the tools to fully participate in the Digital economy and society- the federal government can play an outsized role in educating citizens and municipalities on how to better leverage a Broadband connection

Thank you again for the opportunity.

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