



**Testimony of the Wireless Infrastructure Association
Before the Assembly Committee on Energy and Utilities
Assembly Bill 303**

Chairman Steffen and Members of the Assembly Committee on Energy and Utilities:

The Wireless Infrastructure (“WIA”)¹ appreciates this Committee’s attention to Wisconsin’s broadband connectivity needs. As the pandemic has cast into stark light, connectivity underpins and powers many facets of participation in modern society. WIA members’ missions are deeply tied to promoting connectivity everywhere and enabling the modern 5G networks that provide mobile and fixed wireless connectivity at previously unimaginable speeds. As such, it is critically important that states create programs like the one proposed by AB 303 to sufficiently fund broadband expansion and adoption so that everyone in the state can connect.

While WIA supports the mission of AB 303, WIA’s members caution against several provisions in the current bill. Primarily, we believe that the bill’s framework of prioritizing projects offering to deliver symmetrical speed² will likely reduce the overall effectiveness of the broadband program. While broadband delivered by fiber-optic cable can offer speed advantages, it also has a higher cost to deploy—sometimes significantly so, which will limit the amount of Wisconsin locations that can be connected using this finite amount of funding—and will often take longer to deploy than other technologies capable of delivering the broadband consumers need. Therefore, we urge the Committee to remove the provision prioritizing projects offering symmetrical speed and instead allow all technologies capable of delivering the minimum broadband speeds of 100/20 to compete for these funds.

Allow Flexibility to Maximize Connectivity

We are currently in the midst of a historic moment in broadband funding.³ Through a combination of private investment and support from the federal and state governments it is possible that we will finally bridge the digital divide in America, bringing social and economic benefits to Americans on a scale unseen since rural electrification. However, to achieve this

¹ WIA represents the companies that build, develop, own, and operate the nation’s wireless facilities. Our members include infrastructure providers, wireless carriers, equipment manufacturers, and professional services firms. WIA advocates for the widespread, responsible deployment of wireless infrastructure to enable mobile and fixed wireless broadband access for communities everywhere.

² Assembly Bill 303 (2023) at pg 6, ln 15 – 20 (Prioritizing projects “that are capable of offering service at actual download speeds of 100 megabits per second or greater and upload speeds of 100 megabits per second or greater”).

³ See e.g., Internet for All Initiative, <https://www.internetforall.gov/> (last visited June 6, 2023) (detailing the Biden-Harris Administration’s efforts across the federal government to deliver connectivity to all Americans).

common goal it is critical that regulators develop flexible rules that incentivize investment and bring benefits to as many people as fast as possible.

Prioritizing symmetrical speed in the broadband program will mean a single technology will be awarded the entirety of the funds, but this is not without tradeoffs that may be unnecessary. Fiber costs significantly more per connection than a comparable wireless technology. This cost is well noted to sharply increase as states try to reach their most rural populations,⁴ which may limit the number of homes that can be connected. Further, the average consumer does not seek out, or utilize, greater upload bandwidth. The gap between downstream and upstream traffic has consistently grown over the last decade, a trend that is likely to increase.⁵

Consumers have shown a rapidly increasing appetite for Fixed Wireless home broadband (“FWA”), with FWA subscriptions capturing 90 percent of net new at-home broadband subscriptions last year.⁶ Fixed wireless is capable of delivering high-quality internet service that consumers demand, and its adoption rate shows that it more than meets consumer needs. Further, providing funds for wireless infrastructure has the dual benefit of supporting fixed and mobile connections.

While fiber has its distinct advantages, the technology also comes with some disadvantages which means it may not be the best solution in every deployment scenario. Congress recognized this in not including a symmetrical requirement for the landmark Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. Accordingly, we urge the legislature to adopt flexible rules that allow all technologies to compete and give Wisconsinites the best value for their money.

Mobility Matters

While the first priority is, rightly, ensuring connectivity to every home, mobile connectivity is also a priority for millions of Americans. In fact, nearly one in five rural Americans use their mobile connection as the primary way of accessing the internet.⁷ Often, the same infrastructure for FWA will also support mobile services- allowing the state to benefit from improving both services. Further, mobile connectivity is essential to enabling first responders and public safety. For example, first responders rely on wireless broadband as they rush to the front lines for fires,

⁴ See Aca Connects-Cartesian, *BEAD Program: A Framework to Allocate Funding for Broadband Availability - Version 2.0* at 13, <https://acaconnects.org/bead-program-framework/> (Feb. 2, 2023); See also, *Improving the Nation’s Digital Infrastructure*, FED. COMM’NS. COMM’N. (Jan. 17, 2017), <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DOC-343135A1.pdf>.

⁵ *The Asymmetric Nature of Internet Traffic*, NCTA (Mar. 22, 2021), <https://www.ncta.com/whats-new/the-asymmetric-nature-of-internet-traffic>.

⁶ Press Release, *About 3,500,000 Added Broadband From top Providers in 2022*, Liechtman Research Group (Mar. 2, 2023), <https://www.leichtmanresearch.com/about-3500000-added-broadband-from-top-providers-in-2022/> (“Top broadband providers added about 3.5 million subscribers in 2022. Fixed wireless services accounted for 90% of the net broadband additions in 2022, compared to 20% of the net adds in 2021.”).

⁷ Andrew Perrin, *Mobile Technology and Home Broadband 2021*, Pew Research Ctr. (June 3, 2021), <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2021/06/03/mobile-technology-and-home-broadband-2021/> (providing a demographic breakdown of smartphone only users).

crime scenes, and disasters and need mobile connectivity on site to protect themselves and the public. In many rural areas, the closest hospital can be an hour or more away. Wireless broadband delivered over 5G networks can turn an ambulance into a mobile emergency room during that “golden hour,” saving lives and preventing disabilities.⁸

WIA urges the Committee not to adopt rules that will unnecessarily require the state to fund a single technology. Rather, the legislature should enable funds to be used for a variety of uses that can be specifically tailored to each community’s need. WIA appreciates your consideration of this important topic and stands ready to work with this committee to craft rules that will develop a program to bring connectivity to all Wisconsin.

Respectfully Submitted,

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⁸ Sanjay Joshi, *5G and Me: And the Golden Hour*, DELL TECHNOLOGIES (Nov. 19, 2019), <https://www.delltechnologies.com/en-us/blog/5g-me-and-golden-hour/>.