



June 6, 2023

Representative David Steffen, Chair
Assembly Committee on Energy and Utilities
Room 323 North, State Capitol
PO Box 8953
Madison, WI 53708

Representative Rob Summerfield, Vice Chair
Assembly Committee on Energy and Utilities
Room 119 West, State Capitol
PO Box 8953
Madison, WI 53708

RE: Oppose Assembly Bill 303, the broadband expansion grant program

Chair Steffen and Vice Chair Summerfield,

On behalf of CTIA®, the trade association for the wireless communications industry, I write to oppose Assembly Bill 303 relating to the broadband expansion grant program. While CTIA shares Wisconsin's commitment to advancing broadband, this legislation will create further barriers to deployment.

The wireless industry strongly supports expanding broadband to ensure everyone has effective connectivity, and our industry has been on the cutting-edge of promoting its deployment to meet ever-growing consumer demand. In 2021 alone, wireless carriers invested nearly \$35 billion to deploy and upgrade their networks.¹ This investment also fuels economic growth in Wisconsin, where the wireless industry supports nearly 53,000 jobs and contributes \$4.7 billion to the state's annual GDP.

As Wisconsin continues to evaluate how it will allocate broadband funding, CTIA strongly encourages the state to adopt a technologically neutral approach to investment. The nature of Wisconsin's topography and substantial connectivity challenges for many communities means that a "one size fits all" approach will not benefit all residents in the state's pursuit to provide robust broadband across the state. Unfortunately, Assembly Bill 303 as drafted effectively puts some broadband technologies at a greater advantage than others.

Specifically, the bill requires giving priority to projects that are capable of offering service at "*download speeds of 100 megabits per second or greater and upload speeds of 100 megabits per second or greater...*" This language would eliminate fixed wireless broadband as an option for consumers. The bill also prevents any wireless provider from challenging a proposed project as being in an area that is already served, because in order to mount a challenge, the provider must agree to provide service at 100/100 speeds in that area. Even if a carrier is offering wireless broadband at 100/20 speed, that would still be insufficient if the provider cannot commit to providing service at 100/100 speed. This bill effectively blocks wireless providers from applying for grants and or even objecting to other applications.

¹ <https://www.ctia.org/news/u-s-wireless-investment-hits-record-high>



As you know, the federal government is currently working to distribute \$42.5 billion in funding to states and territories to support broadband deployment through the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program. A technologically neutral approach that avoids mandates – such as excessively high minimum speed requirements – that needlessly foreclose specific types of broadband options and instead supports wireless alongside fiber and other options promotes competition and enables Wisconsin to achieve maximum benefit from broadband investment programs. The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), which issued guidance related to the use of federal broadband funding, allows states to select broadband funding projects featuring other technologies, like 5G fixed wireless, taking into account cost, time to build, potential return on investment and economic benefits. Protecting this flexibility is critical considering that:

- While speeds vary by location and demand, most 5G fixed wireless services already can offer 100 Mbps down and 20 Mbps up.
- 5G fixed wireless can help meet challenges where deployment is cost-inhibitive or more expensive, especially in rural areas. As NTIA Administrator Alan Davidson noted, “for the really high-cost areas we fully expect that there will be states who have significant portions of [non-fiber] technologies.”

Before prescribing arbitrary speed metrics, it is important to understand that consumer broadband usage is asymmetrical, with twelve times more download than upload demand. Consider that a typical family of six as an example of a typical American household’s broadband needs:

- The father is streaming a movie in 4K ultra high definition;
- The mother is on a Microsoft Teams call with her coworkers;
- One child is having a telehealth visit with her doctor on Kareo Telehealth’s platform;
- Another child is using Skype with two friends;
- The youngest child is using Zoom to participate in his math class; and
- Another YouTube video is being streamed in the background.

According to the relevant apps themselves, the data needs are only 40.2 Mbps downstream and 8.5 Mbps upstream. Calls for symmetrical speeds are unnecessary, do not reflect consumer’s actual broadband usage and do not serve the best interest of consumers in Wisconsin. The most effective approach is alignment with the BEAD requirement of 100/20 to cover unserved rural areas in Wisconsin.

In conclusion, we oppose Assembly Bill 303.

Sincerely,

Jeremy Crandall
Assistant Vice President
State Legislative Affairs