

US House of Representatives: Committee on Small Business

**Rural Development, Agriculture, Trade, and Entrepreneurship
Subcommittee**

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Gettysburg, PA

Madam Chairwoman Finkenauer and Ranking Member Joyce as well the other members of the sub-committee, I am grateful for the opportunity to provide testimony today given the correlation of broadband technology to economic development. My name is Mike Ross, and I am President of the Franklin County Area Development Corporation (FCADC). As a matter of background, the FCADC is a 501(c) 6 private non-profit corporation charged with formulating, implementing, and promoting a comprehensive Franklin County-wide economic development strategy that nourishes planned growth and family sustainable employment opportunities. The strategy is based on the retention & expansion of existing companies, the selective attraction of new industries, and the start-up of new businesses. Over the past 33 years, our office has facilitated 765 projects that have resulted in more than \$2 Billion of new capital investments in Franklin County. This investment has impacted more than 50,000 jobs.

Franklin County is among the fastest growing counties in the state. Strategically located along the Interstate 81 corridor with easy access to Interstates 78, 76 and 70, the County is within a one day's drive of 50% of the North American population,

including the major population centers in the mid-west, northeast, and Canada.

Additionally, Franklin County is within 75 minutes of the Port of Baltimore and three hours from the Port of Philadelphia. When combined with two class one intermodal terminals, Franklin County is an ideal location for myriad industries including manufacturing, transportation, logistics, and defense. Target Distribution Center, Ulta, Inc., Staples Distribution, , and Procter & Gamble have all established logistics centers in the County. Franklin County is also home to manufacturers such as Manitowoc Crane Group, Volvo Construction Equipment, JLG Industries, Epiroc Drilling Tools, and Johnson Controls, as well as the Letterkenny Army Depot, to name a few. In addition, Franklin County is among the top 5 agricultural producing counties in the Commonwealth.

Infrastructure is the foundation of economic development. Retaining, attracting, and/or supporting the start-up of quality employers requires the availability of a full range of public utilities, including telecommunications and broadband technology. I have often remarked that economic development is not possible unless you can flush a toilet. The same can be true for broadband internet. Broadband needs to be considered as part of our national public infrastructure, just like roads, water, sewer, ports, airports, rail networks, and a reliable electric grid.

To state the obvious, we live in a globally connected economy and for our companies to successfully compete, especially those in rural America, they need to have high-speed internet and broadband connectivity. The transfer of medical as well as

technical documents, fabrication drawings, and video conferencing **requires** high-speed internet and broadband connectivity. As I mentioned previously, Franklin County is home to some of the most widely recognized manufacturers in the world, and their ability to connect to their other locations, is critical. Moreover, as our national conversation has shifted to the importance of education and workforce development, to include online and distance learning, high-speed internet has become essential.

As it stands now, the lack of broadband capacity in rural settings creates a disparity in educational opportunities and outcomes. According to a June 2019 report from the Center for Rural PA entitled "*Broadband Availability and Access in Rural Pennsylvania*", over 800,000 Pennsylvanians do not have access to FCC levels of broadband connectivity, classified as download speeds of a minimum 25 mbps. Locally our median download speeds are abysmal according to the report. Download speeds in our area range from a low of 5.9 mbps in Adams County-, where we are right now and which is home to the Gettysburg Battlefield and Gettysburg College-to- 14 mbps in Blair County, home of Congressman Joyce. None of the speeds are acceptable. It is important to note that Governor Wolf in collaboration with the Pennsylvania Legislature has created a bipartisan *Broadband Initiative* whose goal is to address the challenges faced by rural Pennsylvania. Launched in 2018, the Pennsylvania Broadband Investment Incentive Program made available \$35

Million in financial assistance to private providers to expand service.

To recap, the availability of high-speed broadband internet in rural America is **CRITICAL** to a vibrant, growing economy and development of a highly skilled workforce that is prepared to compete in an ever-increasingly connected global economy. Again, thank you for the opportunity to testify.