

UScellular: Statement on AB303 Broadband Bill

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Bill Unnecessarily Favors Higher-Cost Fiber Over Competitive Solutions; Would Still Leave 85,000 Wisconsinites without Connectivity After All Identified State and Federal Funds are Deployed

Stephanie Cassioppi, Senior Director of Government Affairs at UScellular, today released the following statement related to her June 6, 2023 testimony before the Assembly Committee on Energy and Utilities. She testified in opposition to WI Assembly Bill 303. The bill, as it stands, harms rural Wisconsin residents because it eliminates the possibility of deploying a mix of reliable technologies to address the unique challenges of getting each rural residence and business connected. Instead, it allows for only one technology, fiber, to be deployed even in areas where the topography or the distance between locations makes buried fiber practically impossible or prohibitively expensive. Wisconsin should be flexible to pick among a variety of technologies to get everyone connected in a timely manner. That variety includes technologies like fixed wireless broadband – a more cost effective, quicker to deploy, resident-preferred option that can and will meet connectivity needs now and in the future.

“The broadband program proposed in AB303 in its current form is not fair to the people of Wisconsin – especially those in rural Wisconsin. It would ultimately leave more than 85,000 rural residences and businesses still without reliable Internet service and cause lengthy delays and a higher cost for the expanded service it will provide (2023 [study](#) by inCode, a division of Ericsson).

“Currently, AB303 allows for only one technology, fiber, to be used to bridge the digital divide in Wisconsin. AB303 sets the requirement at symmetric 100 upload and download speeds — this goes against the federal government’s guidance and

against data that shows that download speeds need to be 12-14 times higher than upload speeds to meet the needs of Americans ([Commscope](#)). And in the process, limits Wisconsin's ability to get every residence and business connected.

"Requiring symmetric 100/100 speeds only serves one purpose: to exclude technologies like fixed wireless broadband from the arsenal of tools available to the state to deploy connectivity for all. That is a disservice to the people of Wisconsin, as fixed wireless broadband is reliable, cost-effective, faster to deploy than fiber in the last mile, and has a multiplier effect of bringing mobile connectivity for the same cost. It is also the technology that customers across the U.S. chose 9 out of 10 times in 2022 to get connected to broadband in their homes (Leichtman Research Group).

"Additionally, AB303 is not financially responsible in using Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Program (BEAD) funds to best meet the needs of the most residents. The reality is that even with all combined sources of government investment, there is not enough federal or state money to deploy fiber to every resident of Wisconsin, and this bill, if enacted, will leave more than 85,000 rural residents and businesses without broadband connectivity.

"For these reasons, AB303 needs to be amended to reflect technology neutral standards and therefore allow for robust competitive options that meet and exceed connectivity needs for Wisconsin residents."