

The Honorable Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Chairman
House Energy & Commerce Committee
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Frank Pallone
Ranking Member
House Energy & Commerce Committee
2123 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Bob Latta
Chairman
Subcommittee on Telecommunications
& Technology
House Energy & Commerce Committee
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Doris Matsui
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Telecommunications
& Technology
House Energy & Commerce Committee
2123 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

April 19, 2023

Dear Chairman Rodgers, Ranking Member Pallone, Chairman Latta, and Ranking Member Matsui:

As you may know, Connect the Future (CTF) works closely with a wide range of rural leaders in communications, small business, tele-medicine, precision agriculture, distance learning, and other fields to drive progress on broadband deployment and access. We appreciate the ongoing work by members of the Energy & Commerce Committee to address obstacles – such as limitations on access to utility poles – that [stand in the way of swift broadband deployment](#) to communities that remain unserved.

Unfortunately, some utility pole owners have sought to defend the status quo by mischaracterizing efforts to address pole-related barriers as an unfair subsidy for rural broadband projects. That premise could not be further from the truth. In reality, the outdated process of adding new broadband infrastructure to existing poles is creating needless hurdles that drive up [costs](#) and [impede broadband deployment](#) to the communities that need it most.

While some pole owners are great partners that want to accelerate broadband construction to their communities, others impose unnecessary delays and costs into the process used to attach broadband lines to poles. This behavior undermines predictability, slows progress, and can allow one party to use its monopoly on pole ownership to thwart competition. It also can lead to disputes that further slow and shift resources away from deploying broadband, or even derail projects entirely (See: [Fights Over Rural America's Phone Poles Slow Internet Rollout](#), *Wall Street Journal*, March 12, 2023).

While the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has authority to guarantee predictable access to poles as it relates to investor-owned utilities, the same standards do not apply to municipalities and cooperatives, who control access to many rural poles.

That is why we support the Committee's [consideration of solutions](#), including the Fair Access to Internet Ready Poles (FAIR Poles) Act, that would help to standardize permitting timelines, and accelerate the resolution of pole attachment disputes to speed broadband deployment and focus government funding on building broadband networks.

Again, thank you for your time and attention on this important issue. CTF looks forward to following your efforts, and we stand ready to serve as a resource as you continue the important work of expanding rural broadband access and bridging our nation's digital divide.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Zachary Cikaneck". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Zach Cikaneck, Connect the Future