

**Committee on Energy and Commerce**

**Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery  
of**

**Subcommittee on Communications and Technology Chair Mike Doyle**

***Hearing on “Strengthening Our Communications Networks to Meet the Needs of Consumers”***

**October 6, 2021**

Today’s hearing presents us once again with the opportunity to discuss and debate the communications needs of our nation while reviewing the proposals our members have authored to meet those needs. It is our responsibility on this Subcommittee to highlight, as we have in so many hearings, the issues important to the people we represent--issues such as access to and the adoption of broadband, resiliency, media localism, and more. And imperatively, it is our duty to explore solutions we can advance to address those issues in a way that makes progress for the nation.

On this Committee, we have a bipartisan tradition that recognizes no single party has a monopoly on good ideas. We consider a large slate of bills specifically before us today. The twelve bills, 6 authored by Democrats, 6 by Republicans, span the jurisdiction of this Subcommittee and highlight so many issues of importance to Americans.

We all have seen the stark reality highlighted by the ongoing pandemic that broadband is a necessity. We have made important investments in funding for broadband deployment and adoption – investments that will help our urban and rural communities, our students and teachers, and those Americans who otherwise could not afford a broadband connection.

To that end, we should examine how the proposals under consideration could speed deployment of wired and wireless networks and assist localities and broadband providers as they facilitate build-out to consumers. We should examine how to ensure incarcerated individuals can remain connected to their families. We should examine the role of localism in the media. And we should examine how we can use connectivity to keep us safe during an emergency.

There are of course a few proposals I think deserve highlighting.

For example, I’m proud that today we will be considering the Martha Wright Prison Phone Justice Act. We must give further consideration to, and act upon, proposals that ensure the incarcerated population and their families have access to communication services at fair and reasonable rates. Studies have shown that the ability to connect with family and support *reduces* recidivism. That means a reduction in crime and reincarceration. Families should not go into debt to maintain contact with an incarcerated loved one. I believe these are goals we can all support.

Perhaps a little more arcane, but critically important, we have to protect the Universal Service Fund from disruption by extending the anti-deficiency act exemption. This is critical to

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connecting rural hospitals, rural homes, schools, libraries, and providing telehealth and discounted internet and phone service.

I'm also happy to see Ms. Fletcher's bill before us, a proposal that aims to treat our local governments as partners, not adversaries, in the effort to deploy broadband.

And of course I'm looking forward to hearing our witnesses thoughts on the Spectrum Innovation Act, which would give consumers access to more spectrum, leading to faster speeds, better networks, and new innovative services.

Mid-band is of critical importance as this "goldilocks" spectrum can both cover substantial geographic areas and handle large amounts of data. We saw unprecedented participation in the CBRS auction last year, a record-breaking C-Band auction earlier this year, and an auction for the 3.45 (three dot four five) band that started just this week. We should build on those successes and we should do so with a process framework that will promote maximum usage of this valuable band. Ultimately, this should be a win for the federal incumbents of the band, consumers, our economy, and the U.S. Treasury.

We have an excellent panel before us today who will provide valuable insight into the bills before us and the issues they seek to address. I also look forward to the feedback and questions of my colleagues to ensure the views of their constituents are heard throughout this deliberative process.

Thank you to both the witnesses who are speaking with us today, and to my colleagues for their contributions to this hearing and their thoughtful legislative proposals. I look forward to continued collaboration on these important topics.