

Public Service Commission: State Broadband Office

Support for Increased Rural Broadband Availability, At Speeds of 25 Mbps or greater

The Citizens of Northwest Wisconsin Request

That the Public Service Commission in Wisconsin holds telecommunications providers accountable to build out networks to meet commercial and consumer broadband needs with competitive prices.

We request support for continued and increased funding of broadband grants in Northwest Wisconsin. We also request that the Wisconsin Broadband Office provides a clear application process defining standards of review and ratings, and how rating points are assigned and by what criteria.

Private providers should be held accountable by providing a report on how those public funds were used and what services were improved after the project is complete.

Background

Rural Douglas County and many areas throughout Bayfield, Ashland and Iron Counties do not meet Federal Communications Commission definition of broadband speed of 25 Mbps down and 3 Mbps up or better.

State broadband support grants have helped many communities in Wisconsin but a great disparity still exists. Some areas have fiber gigabit service for \$75 a month while 50 Mbps service is \$1500 a month in Superior. Consistent, fair and level internet pricing is critical for a strong Wisconsin.

Many areas in Douglas County and neighboring counties are falling behind the rest of the state. A minimum of 25 Mbps is a must. Those living in rural areas are most in need of broadband infrastructure improvements and assistance. This is because they are less likely to be a recipient of private company investments compared to more densely populated areas.

Cellular Internet or mobile hotspots can provide adequate speeds within their LTE coverage areas but even their "Unlimited" packages do cap and throttle service, typically around 22GB. Satellite Internet can also be fast, but data latency can cause challenges for distant learning and education, remote access, live teleconferencing, voice over Internet protocol (VOIP), and online entertainment due to technological restrictions and bandwidth caps.

Without removing this barrier, we have very serious concerns about future rural broadband infrastructure and its impact on attraction of new residents, and retention of existing residents. True broadband is a critical need for attracting and retaining students and professionals to our region.