

February 24, 2015

EX PARTE

Ms. Marlene H. Dortch
Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Portals II, Room TW-A325
Washington, DC 20554

Re: Ex Parte Communication: WC Docket Nos. 14-115, 14-116

Dear Ms. Dortch:

This letter is to inform you that on February 24, 2015, Matthew Shuler, MIS/GIS Director, Town of Highlands (Highlands, North Carolina), Richard Thornton, Treasury Services Manager, McKee Foods Corporation (Bradley County, Tennessee), Eva VanHook, Executive Director of Family Promise of Bradley County (Bradley County, Tennessee), Jeff Wilson, IT Director, Town of Holly Springs (Holly Springs, North Carolina), Ellen Satterwhite and Jazmyn Blockson of the Glen Echo Group spoke on the phone with Gigi Sohn, Lamar Robertson and Eric Feigenbaum of the FCC in connection with the proceedings mentioned above. Below is a summary of the conversation.

Jeff Wilson

Mr. Wilson described the state of broadband competition in Holly Springs and its impact on consumers and businesses. Holly Springs has a lot of small businesses who are frustrated at the price point as well as limitations on upload speeds of current broadband service offerings. Mr. Wilson noted that the lack of competition for services and expense of broadband hampers businesses that need broadband to run on a day-to-day basis. These smaller to midsize businesses only have access to dedicated lines that do not offer the speeds of fiber optics.

Specifically, Mr. Wilson described the issues faced by a graphic design that does 3D modeling for architecture firms. The headquarters of this company are out of the country and the Holly Springs branch is constantly having difficulties sending files back and forth. In addition, a healthcare technology company relocated their data center outside of the business park because of lack of services.

In the past, the town had a partnership with Dukenet, who was offering small and medium sized businesses an affordable price for 50 Mbps or 100 Mbps. Once Dukenet was acquired by Time Warner, the partnership dissolved and the service offerings went away.

Finally, Mr. Wilson noted that the town will soon be disadvantaged even more as the town over is getting Google Fiber and the town over is getting AT&T Gigapower.

Town of Highlands

Matthew Shuler

Mr. Shuler discussed the lack of affordable, high-speed broadband access in the town of Highlands. Highlands is a resort-style community with about 1,000 full time residents that can swell during peak seasons. Northland cable (Charter) and Frontier.

Around 2009 they heard that people were not getting the speeds they desired from incumbent service providers Northland Cable and Frontier. The city has trunk fibers in place and could do a fiber to the home deployment fairly rapidly if the state law were not in place.

Mr. Shuler noted the lack of affordable, high speed broadband was a hindrance to economic development. He offered anecdotal evidence that people have walked away from home purchases because of the lack of broadband service. Then the small retail stores and building industry suffer as well. The town would like to grow a technology sector, but cannot because of the lack of affordable, high speed broadband.

Richard Thornton

Mr. Thornton expressed his view that the free market has let him and his neighbors down. He has lived in his home for the last 30 years and there's no phone, cable, fiber – he relies on two mobile hot spots from two carriers.

Mr. Thornton and his neighbors have approached incumbent Charter Communications on several occasions and they will not bring service to his home.

Mr. Thornton pays \$316 for internet, television and landline phone service. It costs him 2.5 – 3 times more for half the speed than he could get from EPB Fiber.

Eva VanHook

Ms. VanHook moved 10 miles from the city limits 11 years ago. In that time, her family has contacted Charter Communications on several occasions to inquire about getting service. Every time, technicians have refused even though their home is technically in the service area.

Her family of 4 relies on satellite service from WildBlue that is subject to a data cap. She described that the family has good service for about a week a month and then receives dial up speeds for the rest of the month. They pay \$80 a month for 3 Mbps download speeds.

Ms. VanHook's two sons face challenges completing their schoolwork or participating fully.

Her oldest child is a senior in high school and for his pre-AP Biology class last year, he had to watch online videos twice a week as homework. He had to complete the assignments at church, his mother's office or a coffee shop because he could not watch the videos at home. Last year's pre-AP Biology class as a reverse classroom.

Ms. VanHook's youngest is in 6th grade. At the start of this school year, his teacher sent a link to an online textbook, which is almost impossible to use at home. Ms. VanHook described going to her office and pulling up pages or printing them out so her son could do his work at home.

Ms. VanHook and her husband feel the effects of the lack of access in their professional lives as well. Ms. VanHook runs a 24 hour homeless shelter and everything is in a salesforce database. It takes her 5-15 minutes to pull up even a phone number. Her husband is an IT professional. If he gets a call in the off hours, he has to remote in to his desktop. It's excruciating for him to do.

Please let me know if you have any questions,

Ellen Satterwhite

cc: Gigi Sohn, Lamar Robertson, Eric Feigenbaum
attachment: FCC Hearing Comments 022115.doc