



January 27, 2021

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Senate Majority Leader
S-230, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Republican Leader
S-221, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Leader Schumer and Leader McConnell:

As Congress considers investments in broadband infrastructure, it should also consider the opportunity to develop high-wage telecommunications jobs to speed the rollout, while also supporting pathways toward greater diversity, safety, and quality for many Americans. The U.S. currently faces a shortfall of skilled workers needed to deploy broadband across the country, to win the race to 5G, and to ensure robust fiber, mobile, and fixed wireless networks. Needed investments in broadband infrastructure will increase demand on a labor force already in short supply. To improve the efficiency of federal funding, a corresponding initiative is needed to develop a workforce properly trained with the skills to deploy next generation wired and wireless networks.

5G alone is projected to create three million direct and indirect jobs by 2025 and contribute \$500 billion annually to the U.S. economy. Current 5G design and buildout has already created over 106,000 direct jobs in installation and engineering. Overall, the U.S. telecommunications industry employs 672,000 workers, with average annual wages that exceed \$77,500. At the current rate of deployment, there will be 850,000 more new direct broadband and 5G jobs through 2025, which federal support would accelerate. While the jobs are there, our American workforce is not currently ready to fill them.

Apprenticeship, as Congress has long recognized, is a time-tested, industry-driven, career pathway through which employers can develop and prepare their future workforce, and workers can obtain paid work experience, classroom instruction, and a nationally recognized credential. We therefore urge broadband infrastructure legislation to provide support for employers to expand registered apprenticeships and associated technical instruction and certification costs. This legislation should also prepare many diverse and qualified candidates for apprenticeships –

including through pre-apprenticeships and other evidence and work-based learning and support programs.

The telecommunications industry is ideally suited for apprenticeship, which is a new but growing solution in our industry. Apprenticeships are proven to help employers recruit and retrain workers, including underserved and underrepresented populations, provide case management, support services, and on-the-job and classroom training to completion.

Congress should also bolster the capabilities of institutions of higher education and other institutions, which have not kept pace with the rapid growth of our industry and the need for curricula necessary to ensure a diverse workforce capable of deploying fiber and 5G infrastructure for commercial mobile and fixed wireless networks. A critical need remains for programs of study in broadband and network engineering, network deployment and field activities, and cybersecurity. There is also a need to modernize existing programs, including hands-on field activities for broadband deployment and better data to inform program design and measure success. To ensure funds target actual needs, employers should drive public-private partnerships with community colleges, universities, and other institutions to develop degrees and programs of study on broadband deployment and 5G training. The telecommunications industry is committed to developing partnerships with institutions of higher education to help translate job requirements from employers during the curriculum development process. Targeted institutions should include Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs).

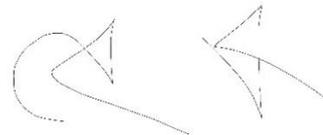
Workforce development and apprenticeships can require long lead times. To jumpstart the process, Congress, and the Administration, working through the U.S. Departments of Labor, Commerce, and Education need to support partnerships with industry to speed development of the broadband workforce. The stakes are high. Without a properly trained 5G workforce, China can use centralized authority to quickly focus labor resources to beat us to the finish line. We cannot build advanced networks to serve tomorrow's needs without a properly skilled and diverse workforce today.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Jonathan Adelstein
President and CEO
Wireless Infrastructure Association



Claude Aiken
President and CEO
WISPA



Steven K. Berry
President and CEO
Competitive Carriers Association



Shirley Bloomfield
CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association



Gary Bolton
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Fiber Broadband Association



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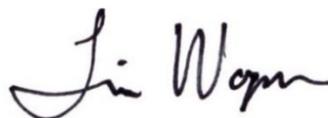
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