



*Pueblo West Metropolitan District
Administration Building
63 E. Spaulding
Pueblo West, Colorado 81007*

February 24, 2021

Members of the House Transportation and Local Government Committee
200 East Colfax
Denver, CO 80203

Re: Support of Rep. Gray's Amendment to HB 1109

Dear Representative:

As Manager of the Pueblo West Metropolitan District (PWMD), I want to express our district's strong support for Representative Matt Gray's amendment to include metro districts, that are wholly located in the unincorporated part of a county, to be able to self certify as "unserved" or "critically unserved" under the provisions of statute created by House Bill HB20-1137, which was passed and signed into law last general session.

Our biggest public policy concern this session is our lack of quality broadband service. Without it, our children have suffered this past year as on-line learning has become more prevalent. In addition, our economic development efforts often fall short when competing with other communities for business relocation or expansion. Finally, the quality of life for our residents has been negatively affected by lack of high speed broadband.

As you know, high speed broadband is more important than ever; however, given our low density, broadband providers are hesitant to provide service without state assistance. We believe Rep. Gray's amendment would go a long way in giving us the ability to self certify as an "unserved" community for potential broadband funding assistance.

Thank you to Representative Gray, the bill's sponsors (Representatives Titone and Soper) and to all Committee members for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Nina Vetter
Pueblo West Metropolitan District Manager

Good afternoon Mr. Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Rose Alvarado. I'm a member of the Communication Workers of America. We would like to thank Representatives Titone and Soper for bringing this important bill.

Broadband is the essential infrastructure of the 21st century. It is a necessity for all, regardless of race, income, or geography. A high-speed Internet connection provides a gateway to economic growth, jobs, education, healthcare, public safety, energy efficiency, civic participation, and communication among friends and family. Broadband is also most residents' voice service provider, replacing plain old telephone service.

Unfortunately, universal access to reliable, high speed, affordable broadband internet is not a guarantee for many Coloradans and is urgently needed in this state. The COVID-19 pandemic has proven what many of us have been saying for years, that the internet is a basic necessity and should be treated as such. The virus has forced people to stay home and, for many, transformed the internet into the sole safe access point for school, work, health care, food delivery, human connection and more.

COVID-19 is a turning point. We must treat the internet as we treat other basic utilities and necessary services such as electricity, water, roads, hospitals, and public safety services. We need a system which serves and is accountable to all Coloradans.

Too many Coloradans lack access to high-speed broadband, experience inadequate speeds, or are forced to pay too much due to lack of competition. This is particularly true in rural areas and urban communities where residents tend to be low income. In order to fully understand the nature of the digital divide we need to collect granular level data, analyze, and publicly report metrics about reliability, price, availability and adoption of broadband services.

We applaud the effort of HB 21-1109 to collect and analyze this information in rural Colorado but are concerned that provisions are not similarly made to find that gaps in urban and suburban communities. We have all heard the stories of Colorado children trying to connect to their online classes from the McDonald's parking lot because they do not have access to reliable internet at home. This oversight presents a huge equity problem, and it is one that we encourage the sponsors and the legislature to continue looking at as this bill progresses through the process.

CWA has additional concerns about the makeup of the Broadband Deployment Board as it is currently constituted. We believe that it is weighted too heavily in favor of industry. The sponsors have shared a copy of the amendment with us and while it is a step in the right direction we would urge the sponsors, this committee, and the legislature to go further in protecting the interests of Colorado consumers.

Now is the time to put the interests of Coloradans first, before corporate profits, and do what is right to insure broadband for all. Once again, we thank the sponsors for bringing this important bill and look forward to working with them throughout the process.