

**Testimony in Support of HB 1608**  
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While many people have discussed the vast economic benefits that passing HB 1608 will have for Pennsylvanians, I want to talk about something more personal. For far too many people across this commonwealth, access to strong communications networks is not a matter of material well-being, but life and death. As the director of the Center for Victims, a non-profit that serves the individuals, families and communities of Allegheny County that are impacted by all forms of violence and crime, I have seen the importance of these services in the most crucial moments. HB 1608 is a hugely important bill not just for the big picture growth and investment it will promote, but also for the impact it will make in the lives of survivors struggling to come to terms with their trauma.

HB 1608 will update our telecommunications laws to allow for more competition and more flexible, individualized service to citizens across the commonwealth. In populated areas like Allegheny County, it will allow for a model based on competition, not regulation, to lower prices and increase the variety of options available to customers. In rural areas, it establishes a framework for transitions to this more streamlined structure. It will also remove barriers for firms to invest in further building out telecommunications infrastructure, providing a jumping off point to more robust possibilities down the road.

These facts are extremely important, but not as an end in of themselves. Rather, they will allow more people to access the next generation networks that increasingly interconnect the world. For survivors and victims of violence, for whom lingering psychological distress can nearly equal the trauma of the act itself, communication is vital for recovery. Without the ability connect to therapeutic or emotional outlets, the residual impact can cripple an individual's ability to recover. It can even lead to suicide. Human beings actively seek, and indeed require, the ability to share their emotional burdens with others as a means to alleviate them. This is the service that we provide, and the reason we do is to empower people to right themselves in the face of often horrific tragedy.

The proliferation of these new communications networks will make this so much easier. By increasing options and lowering costs, survivors and victims of violence will have more opportunities to tap into resources to get the help they need. Regardless of whether they lean on close interpersonal relations, or groups like ours, the growth in opportunity caused by this law will foster recovery and very likely save lives. Even if this were the only result, the law would be worth supporting. The intimate, human benefits of HB 1608 should not be lost in the discussion of why this bill should become law.

The benefits of HB 1608 extend far beyond our issues, enabling growth and opportunity across the commonwealth. Nevertheless, in terms of direct, positive impact, there are few places where it will do more immediate good than in helping victims of violence out of the shadows of their traumatic experiences. By easing their ability to connect to resources that will help them recover, HB 1608 will do tangible good that alone outweighs any arguments against passing the bill. For the people in our commonwealth who desperately need a voice on the other end of the line to help them through

unimaginable anguish, HB 1608 is a light in the darkness. Please extend a hand and help make these possibilities a reality for those who desperately need it.