

Testimony in support of HB 1608

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As the President and CEO of Junior Achievement of Western Pennsylvania, I have dealt first-hand with the rapid innovation happening in the world. We are constantly evaluating our curricula to make sure our students are prepared for the new global economy. The government of Pennsylvania needs to feel the same responsibility for the citizens and businesses that call this Commonwealth home. Though we are very proud of the 68,000 children we reach in Western Pennsylvania, that number pales next to the almost 13 million people and countless businesses that reside in the Commonwealth as a whole. We need to make sure our rules and regulations are up to speed with the modern world. HB 1608 is a necessary step for bringing Pennsylvania's telecommunications structure closer to a level where it can be a premier competitor in the new economy.

Our outdated regulation of the dynamic, competitive telecommunications industry makes as much sense as educating children in a one-room schoolhouse. Bringing this legal and regulatory framework into the 21st century is crucial for Pennsylvania's continued growth and prosperity. HB 1608 recognizes that communications providers compete fiercely in non-rural areas, and that residents will benefit more from a market-based pricing structure than a regulatory one decades out of date. Numerous studies and real-life experiments in other states confirm this. Companies will compete to provide the best service and prices, and customers will flock to whichever does. In rural areas, the same protections will continue until competition is robust enough to phase them out. Most crucially, the current structure discourages the private investment that will power Pennsylvania's 21st century economy. This investment is a source of competitive jobs, as well as human, community, and financial capital, none of which we can afford to lose.

The human aspect of this law is most important to me. Every day I deal with students preparing to go out in the world and forge their own lives. They are entering an economy more dynamic than any in human history. Educators must have the tools to train these students so that they are competitive in the new frontier of the workplace. HB 1608 is so vital because it helps students both in and outside of their formal education. At home, it will lower costs and increase options so that a variety of communications services become ubiquitous in the lives of our children. During education, it will help teachers access the tools they need to prepare students in any subject. The telecommunication options will multiply, giving our educators the opportunity to expose students to experiences that previously would have been out of reach.

The benefit of these changes is obvious. The more our own students can benefit from such opportunities, the greater advantage they will have over students from states who don't prioritize these reforms. Over time, this trend will boost Pennsylvania, as our forward-thinking policy allows us to outstrip competitors who don't emphasize dynamism in the new economy. HB 1608's benefits aren't just immediate. It will have long-term, far-reaching benefits that will uplift every aspect of our Commonwealth's livelihood.

This is a law for both the present and the future. If we don't act soon, other states will pull further away from Pennsylvania, leaving us and our children further behind. If we pass HB 1608, however, we can ensure that Pennsylvania prepares itself for a thriving future built on the foundation of a dynamic communication infrastructure. By moving forward in competitive areas, and preparing the path in rural areas that still need to catch up, we can improve pricing, options, and reliability for citizens and businesses alike, without losing the consumer protections upon which Pennsylvanians depend. Sacrificing our long term prosperity for decade old regulations is the wrong path for our Commonwealth to take.