

Senate Communications and Technology Committee

Public Hearing to Discuss Improving Access to High-Speed Broadband Internet

September 5, 2019 at 10 a.m.

Penn State Fayette, the Eberly Campus

My name is Paul Allison and I am the Associate Vice President for Information Technology at California University of Pennsylvania.

Access to higher education and resources to support success in attaining that education directly contributes to a regions economic and overall well-being. Broadband availability in a region has a major impact on the ability of the people to access and successfully complete educational programs in a variety of ways. Being the largest online education provider in the state system, California University of Pennsylvania sees those affects from the online, on campus and commuter perspective.

The first barrier presented by poor or nonexistent broadband is seen in the application process. Most institutions utilize online applications for admission into programs. Students will need to have a strong broadband service to complete the application process. Completing the college application might require submitting large documents. Without broadband service, students may be unable to complete their college application or miss deadlines or scholarship opportunities.

Once admitted, online students face many challenges without broadband access. Course content, interactive learning tools, student exam identity authentication, supplemental materials downloads, and course assignment submission are all bandwidth intensive activities and a slow home or library internet connection will hinder or in some cases prevent the student from those activities.

Commuter students, which account for a large percentage of the student population from broadband deficient areas, also face challenges. College courses require significant out-of-classroom technology use to complete assignments and interact with peers. Students who are already juggling jobs and family now have to either spend more time on campus or drive to locations where broadband is available. Lack of broadband access greatly increases the likelihood that a student will not complete their degree program.

In Summary, if our rural communities are to survive and preferably thrive, it is critical that we provide opportunities for furthering the educational opportunities of the residents. Education broadens our thinking and exposes us to new possibilities. Each new idea, new product, new service can help fuel the success of the community. Expansion of broadband access will allow more students from disadvantaged communities to pursue higher education, who may not be able to do so otherwise. Providing broadband service to rural communities will ensure each student has equal opportunity to apply for colleges and be considered for all financial aid available to them. While there have been great advances in readily available computer technology for students like a \$200 tablet, there is still a large gap in getting people online and connected. Broadband access would open a world of opportunity for students in inaccessible areas creating the possibility of mobility and advancement for the geographically or socioeconomically challenged.