

**Before the
Federal Communications Commission
Washington, D.C. 20554**

In the Matter of)
)
State of Competition in the Communications) GN Docket No. 26-78
Marketplace)
)

**COMMENTS OF
NTCA–THE RURAL BROADBAND ASSOCIATION**



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May 21, 2026

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NTCA–The Rural Broadband Association (“NTCA”)¹ hereby submits these comments in response to the Public Notice in the above-captioned proceeding.²

I. INTRODUCTION & SUMMARY

In the Public Notice, the Federal Communications Commission (the “Commission”) seeks comment on the state of competition in the communications marketplace. NTCA advocates on behalf of approximately 850 independent, community-based broadband providers that promote innovation in rural and small-town America. These small rural providers serve customers in 44 states, covering about one third of the nation’s landmass. The population density in most members’ service areas is roughly five to 10 customers per square mile.³

¹ NTCA represents approximately 850 community-based companies and cooperatives that provide advanced communications services in rural America and more than 400 other firms that support or are themselves engaged in the provision of such services.

² *Office of Economics and Analytics Seeks Comment on the State of Competition in the Communications Marketplace*, Public Notice, GN Docket No. 26-78 (rel. Apr. 6, 2026) (“Public Notice”).

³ In the context of offering services subject to this proceeding, many NTCA members are incumbent local exchange carriers (“ILECs”) and rural telephone companies as defined in the Communications Act of 1934, as amended (the “Act”), and are referred to herein as “rural local exchange carriers” or “RLECs.”

NTCA members have worked for decades to invest in our nation's future by deploying essential state-of-the-art, advanced communications infrastructure in the most rural, hard-to-reach areas of the country. These dedicated providers ensure rural Americans have access to affordable, reliable and robust broadband services to connect their homes, businesses and communities to the rest of America and the world. NTCA members have continued to expand the availability of fixed broadband services and increase the speeds delivered to customers year after year.

Despite these investments, small, rural providers continue to face significant barriers to deployment. Lengthy permitting delays and substantial rights of way fees unrelated to the locality's actual costs add significant, unnecessary costs to deployment at best and drive small providers out of the market at worst. Furthermore, attempts to move from the existing Business Data Services framework overlook the substantial investment RLECs have made in fiber and IP-enabled capabilities that were made possible by the framework. Similarly, subscriber line charges and access recovery charges remain important in providing marketplace stability for small rural providers serving rural and remote areas while proposals to reform Intercarrier Compensation threaten to undermine the predictable revenue stream that RLECs rely upon to advance IP transition. In addition, multichannel video programming distributors ("MVPDs") continue to face many challenges that drive small MVPD providers out of the market. These challenges include escalating retransmission consent fees combined with bundling of channels, both of which increase costs for providers and consumers. Added to these ongoing challenges, a few large broadcasters are urging the Commission to mandate MVPD providers and consumers undergo the significant costs necessary to deliver ATSC 3.0 programming rather than allow the marketplace to drive a voluntary transition.

II. REGULATORY UNCERTAINTY COMBINED WITH COSTLY AND TIME-CONSUMING BARRIERS UNDERMINE INVESTMENT AND COMPETITION

In the Public Notice, the Commission seeks comment on competition and service availability for fixed broadband services.⁴ The Commission also seeks comment on “whether laws, regulations, regulatory practices, or demonstrated marketplace practices pose a barrier to facilities-based competitive entry into the marketplace for the provision of fixed services, or to the competitive expansion of existing facilities-based service providers” including the impact on small businesses providing facilities-based fixed broadband services.⁵

NTCA members understand that their communities rely on quality and affordable communications services for employment, healthcare, education, farming, and more, along with the challenges that are unique to rural America in providing those services. They continue, however, to meet the demand by increasing their broadband capacity and service offerings. According to data collected through NTCA’s 2025 Broadband/Internet Availability Survey Report,⁶ an average of 75.3% of member customers subscribe to speeds of 100 Mbps or greater, up from 67.3% in 2024. The most popular tier remains speeds between 100 Mbps and 1 Gbps, with 59.6% of customers subscribing to those offerings.⁷

NTCA members also report that, on average, 91.5% of customers can access maximum downstream speeds of at least 100 Mbps, compared to 88.6% in 2024. In addition, 78.9% of customers can access downstream speeds of 1 Gbps or greater, up from 76.4% in 2024.⁸ With

⁴ Public Notice at ¶ 4.

⁵ *Id.* at ¶ 5.

⁶ Broadband/Internet Availability Survey Report 2025, (Dec. 2025) available at <https://www.ntca.org/sites/default/files/documents/2025-12/2025BroadbandInternetAvailabilityReport.pdf> (“NTCA Broadband Report”).

⁷ *Id.* at p. 5.

⁸ *Id.* at p. 4.

respect to upstream speeds, 89.2% of member ILEC customers can access speeds of at least 100 Mbps, up from 84.9% in 2024, while nearly three-quarters (73.4%) can access upstream speeds of 1 Gbps or more.⁹

Despite these advancements, regulatory uncertainty as well as permitting delays and rights of way (“ROW”) fees unrelated to the cost of deploying service pose significant barriers to entry and expansion of communications services. In fact, in NTCA’s Broadband Report, nearly 45% of survey respondents cited regulatory uncertainty as a significant barrier to broadband deployment, while 41.3% cited permitting delays as a significant barrier.¹⁰ Rural broadband providers continue to face substantial barriers when deploying and maintaining networks, particularly with respect to obtaining permits from state and local governments. Excessive and unpredictable fees, lengthy permitting delays, and additional requirements—such as railroad crossing obligations—significantly impede efficient broadband deployment in rural areas.¹¹ These challenges are compounded by challenges unique to rural America: sparse populations, difficult terrain, and limited construction seasons.

Some localities impose fees for access to public ROW that bear little or no relationship to the actual costs incurred by the locality. These unreasonable and unpredictable charges have, in some cases, forced providers to abandon planned broadband expansion projects.¹² The Commission can help eliminate these barriers by ensuring that permitting and ROW fees are

⁹ *Id.* at p. 5.

¹⁰ *Id.* at p. 7.

¹¹ The NTCA Broadband Report found that 41% of respondents consider permitting delays a significant barrier to widespread fiber deployment. *Id.*

¹² *See, e.g., Accelerating Wireline Broadband Deployment by Removing Barriers to Infrastructure Investment et. al.*, Third Report and Order and Declaratory Ruling, 33 FCC Rcd 7705, ¶ 145 (2018) (the Commission found that some states and localities have engaged in “dilatatory tactics that amount to de facto refusals to allow deployment” contrary to Section 253(a) of the Act.).

reasonable, clearly disclosed in advance, and directly tied to the locality's actual costs associated with granting access.

NTCA's members have been heartened by recent federal efforts to mitigate regulatory challenges. For example, the Trump Administration has led efforts to streamline National Environmental Policy Act ("NEPA") reviews. In April 2026, the Council on Environmental Quality, part of the Executive Office of the President, released guidance to federal departments and agencies regarding how to establish, revise, adopt, and apply categorical exclusions in accordance with NEPA.¹³ Notably, the guidance provided in this memorandum would allow construction along public ROW to commence without the need for an environmental review due to the fact that these ROWs have already likely undergone multiple construction projects. This sensible policy decision will have significant benefits to broadband deployment. Eliminating this environmental review is an important method of reducing the review time for permitting, saving providers valuable time, money and employee resources, while delivering service to customers much sooner.

Another regulatory challenge broadband providers face when attempting to deploy connectivity to their communities is a lack of a permitting application review deadline. The Commission could lower the cost and amount of time it takes to deploy broadband by adopting a permitting "shot clock" that establishes an absolute deadline for application review and approval, absent incomplete applications. Such a framework would reduce unnecessary delays while preserving the ability of states and localities to adopt shorter review timelines if they choose.

¹³ See *Establishing, Revising, Adopting, and Applying Categorical Exclusions Under the National Environmental Policy Act*, Memorandum for Heads of Federal Departments and Agencies, Apr. 9, 2026, available at <https://ceq.doe.gov/docs/ceq-regulations-and-guidance/Categorical-Exclusion-Guidance-2026.pdf>.

Likewise, “in-kind” contributions imposed by numerous permitting authorities as a mandatory condition for authorization to access public ROWs have no bearing on actual costs and create an unnecessary barrier to entry. The Commission should prohibit these unnecessary and sometimes prohibitive barriers to entry that harm competition.

III. THE NATIONAL BROADBAND MAP CANNOT, ALONE, BE RELIED UPON TO MAKE AN ACCURATE ASSESSMENT OF THE STATE OF COMPETITION OR SOUND DECISIONS ON WHERE TO DIRECT BROADBAND FUNDING

A. Suspect Coverage Claims Undermine the Map’s Effectiveness, and the Map Should be Seen as a Resource, Rather than the Final Word, in Determining Availability

The Commission cannot adequately assess the state of competition in the broadband marketplace by using data found on the National Broadband Map (“NBM”) alone. NTCA members continue to report highly suspect coverage claims and significant inaccuracies with respect to the Broadband Serviceable Location (“BSL”) Fabric (the “Fabric”), and the map by its own terms captures neither *actual* (vs. advertised) service availability nor (as discussed further below) the capability of a provider to in fact serve every customer that it claims to serve if they all were to order service. In short, by definition, the NBM reflects *theoretical* availability, thereby providing a helpful starting point for competitive assessments rather than a finish line. Indeed, while the NBM has improved significantly since the Broadband Data Collection (“BDC”) was launched due to the iterative reporting, verification, and challenge processes that have refined the quality of availability data and the underlying Fabric, there is more to be done. Even as successful bulk availability challenges have revealed overstated coverage claims to some

extent, lingering structural problems in the challenge process limit would-be challengers' ability to address these.¹⁴ Thus, as a first step, the Commission should:

- Revise reporting standards to reflect proven technological capabilities on an objective basis and the likely delivery of service levels, rather than allowing providers to report based upon advertised performance alone;¹⁵
- Create public “heat maps” highlighting where numerous challenges and crowdsourcing concerns arise in an area or where coverage claims look questionable in light of objective technical standards. More specifically, if (a) there are numerous challenges of the same provider in a given area, or (b) if a coverage report looks questionable on its face as compared to what other ISPs report in terms of performance and scope using similar technologies, these should be treated as “red flags” for investigation and audit. In addition, the Commission should allow for the limited use of speed tests in the crowdsourcing context now for bulk availability challenges – if a statistical sample of speed tests raises a flag, the Commission should undertake additional investigation.
- Make challenges more “sticky” – if a party wants to reassert coverage where it has previously lost a challenge in a subsequent filing, the entire area should be seen as *prima facie* unserved and the burden should flip to the reporting entity to prove service.

B. The Fabric and Challenge Process Must Improve

With respect to the Fabric, NTCA members report missing and mislabeled locations – among other things, they report that open fields and sheds along train tracks are depicted as BSLs. What are inarguably, based upon visual evidence, barns, stock tanks, lakes and swamps are also labeled as BSLs. In addition, locations where providers have active subscribers – in some cases, they have had subscribers at these locations for decades – are missing or labeled as non-“serviceable” locations. Moreover, the Fabric challenge process lacks transparency and communication, as there appears to be little to no communication as to whether a Fabric

¹⁴ Comments of NTCA, WC Docket No. 19-195, at 2-9 (Feb. 19, 2024) (highlighting “challenge codes” are not calibrated to account for the circumstances that prompt the filing of a challenge and in a manner that would ensure they are effective in identifying inaccurate coverage claims).

¹⁵ Comments of NTCA, WC Docket No. 19-195, at 4 (Oct. 7, 2024) (stating that the Commission should adopt “technical reporting standards [that] operate not only as information that ISPs include as supporting documentation with their BDC filings, but also as parameters around the extent of coverage that can be claimed in the first instance.”).

challenge has been accepted after filing. After submission, several months or more can elapse before any response or resolution to a challenge itself is communicated (and in many cases none is ever provided). In addition, there is little to no communication as to why a challenge was denied or the evidence upon which that determination was based. Frustratingly, visual evidence is no longer accepted as part of a Fabric challenge.

At the very least, to ensure that future funding decisions are built upon a more accurate assessment of how many locations lack access to broadband and where those actually exist, the Commission should:

- allow the submission of visual evidence going forward;
- treat evidence of current or recent (*e.g.*, past 12 months) active billing of service to that location as *prima facie* evidence of serviceability; and
- explain what contrary evidence/criteria were used to justify the denial of a Fabric challenge.

C. The Map Should Only Be Used to Identify Whether an ISP *Could* Serve an Area, Not Whether the ISP is in Fact Capable of Serving Every Location in an Area

Should amendments to the Fabric and BDC challenge processes be enacted as NTCA has proposed, the NBM was not built for – and should not serve as – an indicator by itself of where any given ISP is necessarily capable of providing (or substituting for) universal service. This is because while an ISP may report that it can serve any single location in a given area, the BDC does not capture, and thus the NBM does not reflect, whether the ISP is in fact capable of serving every location in that same area. In fact, it is clear from commonly applied engineering principles and real-world experience that, particularly where shared capacity is used to serve entire geographies on a network, such networks may be incapable of delivering the professed level of service to every location in that area even though the NBM indicates that the ISP can serve any one of those locations.

To be clear, this is *not* a mapping problem but rather a *how the map is used* problem. The Commission therefore should utilize a methodology by which it can “translate” the NBM to determine its implications for universal service. Rather than accepting the map as “gospel,” it should be used as a starting point for making data-driven decisions on policy and funding. Pursuant to a proposal previously made by NTCA on this issue,¹⁶ when assessing coverage claims made by ISPs relying on “shared capacity” technologies and using those claims to make funding decisions, reasonable engineering standards can and should look at the number of locations that a provider claims it can serve and then in turn identify the percentage of locations that can realistically be served. As a model here, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration addressed potential capacity concerns with respect to unlicensed fixed wireless by setting forth a methodology by which Eligible Entities could evaluate the capabilities of these providers.¹⁷ In any case, shared capacity in the distribution to individual consumers affects performance and cannot be ignored or waved away in determining where service is universally available. Each of the methodologies discussed herein go beyond the narrow BDC challenge and crowdsourcing processes to capture what truly constitutes an “unsubsidized competitor.”

IV. THE COMMISSION SHOULD NOT ELIMINATE RULES THAT UNDERPIN BUSINESS EXPECTATIONS

A. Business Data Services Are Important to the Stability of Service in Rural Areas

The Business Data Service (“BDS”) framework for rate-of-return carriers remains a key component of the overarching framework that works to promote and maintain universal service

¹⁶ NTCA *ex parte* letter, WC Docket No. 10-90, et al. (Nov. 7, 2024), Attachment A.

¹⁷ Nat’l Telecommunications and Information Administration BEAD Restructuring Policy Notice (Jun. 6, 2025), Appendix A, available at <https://www.ntia.gov/other-publication/2025/bead-restructuring-policy-notice>.

in high-cost, rural areas. The existing BDS framework, including periodic opportunities for voluntary election of incentive regulation, promotes investments and helps achieve the nation's universal service goals and statutory mandate in Sections 151 and 254 of the Act. Notably, the current framework has promoted substantial investment in fiber and IP-enabled capabilities by RLECs. Moreover, the costs of compliance with the existing BDS regulatory framework are not unduly burdensome for RLECs, particularly when placed in the context of the pro-small business regulatory certainty that the existing framework fosters.

The BDS framework has also allowed some smaller operators to elect to leave pooling arrangements and/or elect incentive regulation for their BDS offerings when afforded the opportunity to do so based upon local conditions and their own investment cycles, rather than distant regulatory fiat. The ability of these providers to make that decision based on market conditions and their own business needs has been and remains important to the deployment of advanced services and networks in rural America. Accordingly, the Commission should maintain the current BDS framework to better ensure the investments made by rural providers continue to deliver reliable, affordable service to rural areas.

B. Any Detariffing of Subscriber Line Charges/Access Recovery Charges Should be Voluntary

The Commission's rules governing end-user charges associated with interstate access services offered by ILECs serve a valuable purpose in promoting universal service, avoiding customer confusion, providing certainty to providers operating in high-cost rural areas, and reducing burdens associated with recovery of regulated costs. For these reasons, the Commission should decline to mandate detariffing of subscriber line charges ("SLCs") and access recovery charges ("ARCs") and should instead enable permissive detariffing driven by providers' own evaluation of local market conditions.

SLCs and ARCs represent an important component of the business case for smaller operators serving rural and remote areas. These charges help to simplify cost recovery, minimize customer confusion and uncertainty, and reduce burdens for rural providers. Hindering the ability of RLECs to recover these revenues through mandatory detariffing would undermine the sustainability of these small businesses and the networks they operate. The Commission's rules governing SLCs in particular play an important and useful role in providing stability and certainty for small businesses. Eliminating such rules would have the unintended and undesirable effect of undermining investment in, and the sustainability of, critical communications services in rural America, all while yielding no commensurate benefit.

SLCs and ARCs funding is also material to NTCA members' operating budgets. NTCA filed comments in response to a Public Notice released by the Commission in June 2025 explaining that using projected data for the 2025-2026 tariff cycle, RLECs would recover nearly \$185 million annually from SLCs and ARCs over the next 12 months.¹⁸ For the average rural operator with only several thousand customers and 30 employees, the risk of disruption to nearly \$200,000 in annual revenue on average could have significant impacts on network expansion plans and maintenance. Indeed, cutting such revenues while providing no reasonable assurance of the ability to offset these losses would introduce the very kind of uncertainty and disruption this Commission has been striving to dispel in the communications marketplace.

Under the Act, the Commission is charged with ensuring that universal service mechanisms are sufficient and predictable. Detariffing the ARC and SLC, however, which were created to help migrate from implicit subsidies to a mix of explicit support and end-user cost recovery, would undermine predictability, call into question sufficiency, and ultimately could

¹⁸ Comments of NTCA, WC Docket No. 20-71 (Aug. 6, 2025).

hinder preservation and advancement of universal service and thereby competition in the communications marketplace.

C. Open proceedings on IP interconnection and intercarrier compensation reform threaten to undermine the predictability necessary for all voice service providers to transition to all-IP networks.

At present, the Commission is considering a proposal to eliminate current voice interconnection constructs, and is doing so under the theory that these existing rules operate as a disincentive for the industry to transition to all-IP interconnection.¹⁹ Yet, as NTCA has stated, in reality, the lack of regulatory certainty surrounding IP interconnection has created a significant barrier to rural carriers' migration to all-IP connectivity.²⁰ As NTCA explained in its IP Interconnection comments, "the primary reason for the nascent and sporadic use of IP interconnections arrangements to date is *the absence of any* 'rules of the road' to provide certainty in this marketplace – and the apparent desire of certain providers to ensure that there will be few, if any, rules to govern such traffic exchange. . . ."²¹ The absence of any "light-touch" rules or regulatory backstops is undermining the certainty needed to spur overall network modernization, including the migration to all-IP network and services. Thus, NTCA has urged the Commission to establish basic "rules of the road" for IP interconnection that define network edges, transport and routing responsibilities, and that more broadly incents all parties involved in

¹⁹ *Advancing IP Interconnection*, WC Docket No. 25-304, *Accelerating Network Modernization*, WC Docket No. 25-208, *Call Authentication Trust Anchor*, WC Docket No. 17-97, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, FCC 25-73 (rel. Oct. 29, 2025), ¶ 30 (stating that "interconnection obligations imposed under section 251(c) of the Act can create heavy burdens for incumbent LECs. These costs can in turn divert resources away from investments in high-speed communications infrastructure, slowing the transition to all-IP networks.").

²⁰ See Comments of NTCA, WC Docket Nos. 25-304, 25-208, 17-97, at 2 (Jan. 20, 2026).

²¹ *Id.* at 2-3 (emphasis in original).

the exchange of voice traffic the certainty necessary to move to an all-IP interconnection environment.²²

With respect to the intercarrier compensation (“ICC”) reform proceeding also currently underway,²³ there too the Commission is proposing steps that could undermine predictable revenue streams that RLECs have and will continue to rely upon to advance the IP transition. As NTCA has noted, unlike larger carriers that serve more densely populated areas of the country, RLECs cannot recover network costs solely from their customers and maintain affordable rates.²⁴ Indeed, the cost-sharing principles built into the switched access charge regime are designed to address this very issue. A transition to a full bill-and-keep framework for these rate elements as well as the rapid wind down of Connect America Fund Intercarrier Compensation, without a recovery mechanism, will have consequences for both network modernization and the continued affordability of voice service in rural communities. This is because, for RLECs, any attempt to recover network costs solely through end user rates would result in unaffordable rates far above those assessed in urban areas. To ensure RLECs can continue to offer cutting-edge services in high-cost, low density areas and at affordable rates, the Commission should maintain the current level of predictability and stability for cost-recovery mechanisms in its ICC proceeding.

V. RISING COSTS ARE CAUSING SMALL MVPDs TO LEAVE THE VIDEO MARKETPLACE

The Commission also seeks comment on the issues and trends affecting competition in the market to deliver video programming services. Rising programming costs and efforts to

²² *See Id.*

²³ *Reforming Legacy Rules for an All-IP Future*, WC Docket No. 25-311, *Accelerating Network Modernization*, WC Docket No. 25-208, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, FCC 26-11 (rel. Feb. 19, 2026).

²⁴ Comments of NTCA, et al., WC Docket No. 10-90, CC Docket No. 01-92, pp 4-5 (Oct. 26, 2017). *See also Id.*, n. 21.

force expensive equipment changes to accommodate ATSC 3.0 are driving many small MVPDs out of the video marketplace, to the detriment of consumers.

A. Endless Retransmission Consent Fee Costs Increases Harm to Consumers

Escalating programming costs, driven in large part by retransmission consent agreements and mandatory channel bundling, continue to accelerate MVPD subscriber losses.²⁵ NTCA members reported that retransmission consent fees increased by an average of \$128,351 in their most recent retransmission consent agreements, following average increases of \$104,020 in 2024 and \$78,022 in 2023.²⁶ NTCA members also reported serving an average of 729 MVPD subscribers, down from 810 in 2024.²⁷

MVPDs serving rural areas are increasingly required to pay substantial retransmission fees simply to deliver broadcast signals to consumers who often cannot receive those signals over the air due to distance or terrain. Moreover, MVPDs have little negotiating leverage because broadcasters remain the exclusive source for their programming under the Cable Act. The Commission should work with Congress to establish a more balanced marketplace for content carriage and create a meaningful framework for good-faith negotiations between broadcasters and distributors so that small rural carriers can continue providing video service to their communities.

In addition to revising outdated retransmission consent rules, targeted market-based reforms could help address some fundamental ways MVPDs are forced to choose between paying significant sums for programming or abandoning video service altogether. These include:

²⁵ NTCA Broadband Report at p. 17.

²⁶ *Id.* at p. 18.

²⁷ *Id.* at p. 17.

- **Transparency:** Mandatory non-disclosure requirements keep the market value of programming under wraps and in the shadows. MVPDs and consumers should be permitted to see and compare pricing from broadcasters in the light of day in a transparent marketplace.
- **Discrimination:** The practice of broadcasters charging different rates to different distributors for the same content within a local market area should be prohibited, especially when there is no pricing transparency in the market.
- **Consumer Choice:** Consumers should have access to a breakdown of each channel’s actual costs and the option to lower their bill by opting out of buying any broadcast channel or basic tier.
- **Consumer Protection:** Consumers and distributors should be permitted to retain access to signals at existing rates pending dispute resolution between broadcasters and MVPDs.
- **Bundling/Tying:** Consumers should not be compelled to buy channels they do not want from the broadcast owner simply to obtain access to a broadcast station.
- **Over-the-Air Signals:** Consumers and distributors should not be required to pay for a broadcast station that a broadcaster cannot deliver over-the-air directly to the consumer.

B. The Market Should Dictate Any Transition to ATSC 3.0, Not Broadcasters

The Commission adopted rules in 2017 allowing broadcasters to begin using ATSC 3.0 “on a voluntary, market-driven basis.”²⁸ The rules were designed to “minimize[e] the impact on consumers and industry stakeholders.”²⁹ Since that time, the market has not driven a widespread switch to this new technology despite supposed “significant improvements in picture quality, audio clarity, interactive features, and public safety capabilities.”³⁰ Notwithstanding the fact that consumers are not embracing ATSC 3.0, a few large broadcasters continue to urge the Commission to force consumers and MVPD providers to purchase equipment and televisions

²⁸ *FCC Authorizes Next Generation TV Broadcast Transmission Standard*, News Release, GN Docket No. 16-142, Nov. 17, 2017 (emphasis added).

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ Petition for Rulemaking of the Nat’l Ass’n of Broadcasters, GN Docket No. 16-142, at 4 (Feb. 26, 2025).

sets capable of delivering/receiving ATSC 3.0 despite the significant additional costs and complexity that such transition requires.

Requiring MVPDs to depart from their normal upgrade cycles, or otherwise alter their operations, and undergo the significant expense necessary to accommodate ATSC 3.0 signals would impose unnecessary burdens on providers already facing significant marketplace pressures. Furthermore, mandating a transition to a standard that consumers and television manufacturers have not broadly embraced would be inconsistent with the Commission's longstanding voluntary-transition approach. This voluntary transition still allows broadcasters desiring to provide ATSC 3.0 programming to do so while allowing the market to guide any transition from existing ATSC 1.0 programming.

As discussed above, the number of MVPD providers and subscribers continues to decline. Accelerating a transition to ATSC 3.0 that would impose substantial costs on those very providers and customers, without corresponding consumer demand or financial benefit, would likely hasten additional market exits. In many rural areas, MVPD providers remain the only practical source of local broadcast programming, including local news, weather, emergency alerts, and community sports programming. Policies that further undermine the viability of these services would ultimately harm rural consumers and competition in the video marketplace.

VI. CONCLUSION

NTCA looks forward to continuing to work with the Commission to advance broadband deployment and preserve communications services in rural America through rules that support the delivery of reliable, sustainable communications even in the most rural parts of the country. For the reasons discussed above, the Commission should adopt policies that promote investment certainty, reduce unnecessary regulatory and permitting burdens, improve the accuracy of

broadband mapping data, preserve longstanding regulatory frameworks that support rural deployment, and address marketplace distortions that threaten the continued availability of video services in rural communities.

Respectfully submitted,



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