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Pennsylvania should get to keep the almost \$23.3 million a year that Verizon turned down to speed up broadband internet service to its rural customers in the state, the state and U.S. Sen Bob Casey contend. The amount represents almost half the money — 45.7 percent — the state could get from

the Federal Communications Commission fund for building out high-speed, broadband internet service to rural locations.

“Losing all or part of this funding would be unfair to Pennsylvania residents in rural and high-cost areas and contrary to the FCC’s goal of ensuring broadband access for all,” Mr. Casey said in a statement. Pennsylvania has 141,397 locations without access to high-speed, broadband in areas eligible under FCC guidelines for the federal funding, which could total \$50.97 million a year statewide for six years. That includes 64,620 in Verizon-served rural locations, according to the FCC. Verizon turned down \$23.27 million for reasons it never explained publicly, though it called the money a small amount in a letter to the FCC. Efforts to reach Verizon officials were unsuccessful.

Northeast Pennsylvania has 1,205 eligible Verizon locations with \$513,686 in annual FCC help: 192 in Lackawanna County with \$76,460 a

year in FCC funding; 90 in Luzerne County with \$27,847 in annual funding; 906 in Wayne County with \$395,385 annually; 16 in Pike County with \$13,900 a year; and one in Monroe County with \$94 a year. The company has no eligible locations in Wyoming or Susquehanna counties because it does not provide telephone service there.

An eligible location means one where the annual cost of providing service is more than \$52.50 but less than \$198.60 — known as the extremely high cost threshold — and the location has no telephone



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service provided by a company that gets no federal help to provide the service, according to the FCC. Some areas remain too expensive to provide service, though the FCC hopes to reduce the number to no more than 1 percent of the population someday. The FCC is considering what to do with the money telephone companies like Verizon reject. The possibilities include auctioning off the money to service providers.

Pennsylvania has provided \$969 million in subsidies to help increase internet speeds for rural areas between 2005 and 2015, Mr. Casey said. During the same period, the state has consistently ranked fifth in the amount of money contributed to the fund that subsidizes phone and internet service in places that lack it. Phone companies doing business in Pennsylvania contributed \$132.7 million in 2014, more than twice what the state is entitled to get back.

The state Public Utility Commission asked the FCC to consider that contribution when deciding what to do with the rejected money. "It (expanding broadband) was a major commitment for the state and the state has ongoing policy needs, ... especially with rural broadband because Pennsylvania has a lot of issues," PUC spokesman Nils Hagen-Frederiksen said.

Pennsylvania has an estimated 803,645 people — about 6 percent of its population — living in areas without access to high-speed, broadband service. That includes 30,119 in Lackawanna County, 14 percent of the county's population; 17,578 in Luzerne County, 5 percent; 24,504 in Wayne County, 45 percent; 3,400 in Wyoming County, 12 percent; 27,228 in Susquehanna County, 66 percent; 625 in Pike County, 1 percent; and 1,487 in Monroe County, 1 percent.

President Barack Obama made expanding broadband a major goal of his administration, believing customers in rural areas should have the same internet access so they can compete economically with the rest of the world. Nationwide, 34 million people, 10 percent of the population, lack access to high-speed broadband service with almost 40 percent of rural Americans, 23 million people, lacking access.

By the FCC's definition, high-speed broadband means someone can download information from the internet in at least 25 megabytes a second and upload at least 3 megabytes a second. The commission raised the standard last year from 10 megabytes a second downloading and 1 megabyte a second uploading. — **Hazleton Standard-Speaker**

Both Lancaster and Easton have expressed a desire to pass ordinances addressing the "blight" of satellite dishes. While these ordinances may be well-intentioned, I caution city officials to understand the implications of attempting to enforce them. In all but the narrowest circumstances, any municipality, homeowners association or landlord attempting to restrict the placement or installation of satellite dishes or TV antennas will run afoul of Federal Communications Commission rules regarding over-the-air reception.

In short, the FCC prevents rules that limit installation, maintenance or use of broadcast antennas and satellite dishes less than 1 meter across. Lancaster's desire to limit the number of satellite dishes on a property and/or to restrict installation to less-unsightly locations conflicts with FCC protections.

Residents receiving a violation from the city would need only to petition the office of the secretary of the FCC to get a hearing on the legitimacy of the ordinance. Even if the ordinance were restricted to the removal of unused dishes, the city would bear the burden of proving that each dish in question is not in service.

Attempting to enforce such a rule would be futile. Regardless of my thoughts on aesthetics, I bemoan the use of my tax dollars to attempt enforcement of rules that are so clearly in violation of federal mandates. As a method for influencing behaviors, try incentives instead of fines.

For two years, Lancaster has touted the roll-out of its municipal broadband network. With widespread availability of low-cost streaming-TV services, why not try this: Offer reduced cost municipal broadband in exchange for removing satellite dishes from properties. Residents would get a low-cost alternative to satellite service, and Lancaster would get to promote an image that is both high-tech and beautiful. — **Lancaster resident writing to lancasteronline.com**

One day after Tennessee Gov. Bill Haslam pitched lawmakers on the need for increased access to broadband internet service in his State of the State address, the Knoxville Republican appeared in front of one of the organizations which would help implement the proposal.

Speaking in front of the Tennessee Electric Cooperative Association, Haslam reiterated his call for expanding access to high-speed internet in the rural areas the organization represents. "The issue is

obviously been how do we take broadband to those places that private providers, that commercial providers have said that they they've done their math, they've said that doesn't work for us," he told the group at legislative breakfast inside the DoubleTree Hotel in downtown Nashville. "We can't just ignore those folks."

The governor's plan calls for directing \$45 million over three years through grants and tax credits to service providers to encourage them to increase access to broadband in rural areas of the state. The overall idea was met with rousing approval and applause from lawmakers during Haslam's speech on Monday. Haslam told the Tennessee Electric Cooperative Association that his proposal relies on support from their group, which he described as people who have established relationships with those in the state's rural communities. "Obviously (I'd) love your help as we sell this," the governor said, reminding the group of the importance of engaging with lawmakers on issues they care about. "There's nothing like showing up in person."

In a statement, David Callis, executive vice president and general manager of the association, has praised the governor's broadband plan. "This proposal would create new opportunities for education, healthcare and commerce in our communities," he said.

During a brief question and answer session at the Tuesday morning breakfast, Haslam admitted that he sees the broadband plan as a component of his larger education effort to provide Tennesseans with opportunities to work toward obtaining degrees and certificates. "Here's my view of government. We can't provide equal results for everyone. But we can provide equal opportunity," he said. "We really do see these two connected."

Haslam's broadband proposal has yet to be introduced in the form of legislation. Although lawmakers appeared to support the overall initiative on Monday, the state's largest private Internet providers such as Google, AT&T and Comcast, have thus far declined to throw their support behind the plan. –
Nashville Tennessean



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