

BRIDGETON

AREA

Chamber of Commerce



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TO IMPROVE OUR ECONOMY**

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Susan Jones, Chairperson of the Board

Anthony Stanzione, Executive Director

Garry Hill, Office Assistant

March 18, 2014

NJ Board of Public Utilities

Kristi Izzo, Secretary

44 South Clinton Avenue, 9th Floor

PO Box 350

Trenton, NJ 08625-0350

RE: Comments on Docket No. T012020155 – Proposed Stipulation of Agreement between BPU Board Staff and Verizon New Jersey – Alleged Failure of Verizon to Comply with Opportunity New Jersey Commitments

To the Board of Public Utilities:

The Board of Directors of the Bridgeton Area Chamber of Commerce, which consists of the 24 area business, education and civic leaders in the greater Bridgeton area, representing 180 businesses and organizations, voted to add its collective voice to others in our region in strong opposition to the acceptance of this proposed agreement by the NJ BPU. A summary of our concerns and reasons for opposition follows:

1. With well over 8% of the population of Cumberland County remaining without access to reliable broadband service, we oppose any agreement that would indicate that Verizon New Jersey has met its requirements under Opportunity New Jersey.
2. Verizon New Jersey customers have paid \$15 billion in surcharges to help ensure that all of New Jersey residents and businesses have access to broadband via fiber optic infrastructure. Verizon must be compelled to do more to fully meet its obligation, especially in a poorer, rural, agricultural-based counties like Cumberland and Salem.
3. The coverage data that the BPU may be relying on appears flawed, making it appear that more areas in the County have wired or wireless coverage when they do not or the service that exists is not reliable. We strongly urge the BPU to obtain verifiable coverage data produced by an independent source with the expertise to produce this critically important data on which current decisions are being made.
4. In any settlement or action between BPU and Verizon, there must be a sensitivity to and recognition of the special nature of this important agricultural region where vast amounts of public funds have been invested to preserve farmland permanently and where the business of farming is so important to the local and the state economy. Lack of broadband service to these rural areas, puts this important part of the region's and state's economy at risk and all underserved farms and businesses at a competitive disadvantage.

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5. By the very nature of the agricultural area and the preserved lands, these areas should not be expected to meet density requirements like other more populated and developable areas of New Jersey in order to have the opportunity for broadband services.
6. Residents and students who live in these rural areas in Cumberland and other counties should not be denied fair access to the educational opportunities provided through good broadband service.

For these reasons, on behalf of Susan Jones, Chairperson of the Chamber Board of Directors, the Officers and the Board of Directors of Bridgeton Area Chamber of Commerce, we ask the NJ BPU, the Governor and our Legislators to withhold approval of this proposed agreement and to instead require Verizon New Jersey to fully meet its obligations to the people of Hopewell Township, Cumberland County and to all the people and to all areas of Cumberland County and New Jersey.

Sincerely,



Tony Stanzione
Executive Director

cc: NJ Governor Chris Christy
NJ Third District Legislators - Senate President Steve Sweeney, Assemblyman John Burzichelli, Assemblywoman Celeste Riley
NJ First District Legislators - Senator Jeff Van Drew and Assemblymen Robert Andrzejczak and Sam Fiochi
Cumberland County Planning Board Rural Infrastructure Committee
Cumberland County Freeholders
Hopewell Township Committee, Cumberland County, NJ

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