

February 28, 2012

The Honorable Jared Carpenter
702 Capitol Ave
Annex Room 203
Frankfort KY 40601

The Honorable Jerry P. Rhoads
702 Capitol Ave
Annex Room 254
Frankfort KY 40601

The Honorable Julian M. Carroll
702 Capitol Ave
Annex Room 229
Frankfort KY 40601

The Honorable Tim Shaughnessy
702 Capitol Ave
Annex Room 229
Frankfort KY 40601

The Honorable Julie Denton
702 Capitol Ave
Annex Room 252
Frankfort KY 40601

The Honorable Kathy W. Stein
702 Capitol Ave
Annex Room 255
Frankfort KY 40601

The Honorable Denise Harper Angel
702 Capitol Ave
Annex Room 229
Frankfort KY 40601

The Honorable Katie Stine
702 Capitol Ave
Annex Room 236
Frankfort KY 40601

The Honorable Ernie Harris
702 Capitol Ave
Annex Room 204
Frankfort KY 40601

The Honorable Ken Winters
702 Capitol Ave
Annex Room 215
Frankfort KY 40601

Re: Rural Groups Oppose Senate Bill 135

Dear Senate Standing Committee on Economic Development, Tourism, and Labor:

A harmful bill is before you this week that would cut basic telephone service to rural, low-income and elderly Kentuckians. Senate Bill 135, if approved in your committee, threatens access to what most consider a basic lifeline, including 911-emergency service, for Kentucky's most vulnerable citizens.

As rural Internet and broadband advocates, we know the importance of having access to all forms of communication, including basic telephone service. **Communication is a fundamental human right.** Lack of basic telephone service isolates people and denies them the right to communicate. Without basic telephone service, rural people will be further isolated from economic and civic participation, and disconnected from the safety our nation's vital emergency service network.

You have the power to ensure that all Kentuckians can continue to count on basic telephone service.

SB 135 would allow AT&T, Windstream, Cincinnati Bell, and other telecommunications companies to end their obligation as “carriers of last resort.” A Carrier of Last Resort is a telecommunications carrier that commits (or is required by law) to provide service to any customer in a service area that requests it, even if serving that customer would not be economically viable at prevailing rates.

Carriers of Last Resort are crucial to help people in rural, remote, and poor communities stay connected via basic telephone service. Because they are not profitable under a traditional market framework, these communities are the least desirable to corporations primarily interested in profits. The real tragedy of this bill is to further disadvantage the most vulnerable people in Kentucky by cutting their ability to communicate with their loved ones, elected officials, potential employers, medical providers and the society at large.

As rural constituents, we feel compelled to express our concern over the negative impact that SB 135 will have on rural, remote, and poor communities in Kentucky. Especially at a time when poverty rates are statistically high and jobs are scarce, Kentuckians cannot afford to lose yet another resource. We are extremely worried that SB 135 will:

- Leave rural, low-income and fixed-income Kentuckians without access to basic phone service, including 911-emergency service.
- Leave customers at the mercy of a utility and its affiliated companies to raise the price for basic service in an area where no other competitor exists.
- Allow possible “redlining” of poor and remote communities where providing service is more costly or higher-maintenance.
- Strip the Public Service Commission of its authority to protect consumers by investigating complaints regarding basic telephone service quality.
- Carriers could decide to abandon or retire their wirelines, resulting in loss of access to vulnerable customers by the competitors.

We strongly believe that SB 135 needs to be stopped, and we respectfully encourage you to vote NO on this harmful legislation.

Instead of allowing corporations to walk away from the responsibility they accepted by receiving funds to become Carriers of Last Resort, we urge you to protect the most vulnerable and to stand up for the economic future of Kentucky. As leaders focused on economic development, tourism, and labor, you know that none of these sectors would be possible or sustainable if all Kentuckians are not assured basic and reliable phone service. Additionally, consider that the places that currently struggle to get basic phone service are likely the ones with least or no access to wireless and broadband service to propel economic development.

Kentucky cannot afford to cut the cord on its people. If the state is to move forward with solid economic development, tourism, and labor plans, it must ensure 100% basic and reliable telephone access to Kentuckians.

For all the concerns and reasons expressed above, members of the Rural Broadband Policy Group, respectfully urge you to protect the most vulnerable Kentuckians and encourage you to invest in the future of Kentucky by voting NO on SB 135.

Sincerely,

Members of the **Rural Broadband Policy Group:**

Appalshop
Center for Rural Strategies
Highlander Research and Education Center
Partnership of African American Churches
Virginia Rural Health Association
Virginia Rural Health Resource Center
Progressive States Network
Center for Media Justice
Institute for Local Self Reliance
Rural Mobile & Broadband Alliance

The Rural Broadband Policy Group is a growing national coalition of rural broadband advocates with two goals: 1) to articulate national broadband policies that provide opportunities for rural communities to participate fully in the nation's democracy, economy, culture, and society, and 2) to spark and kindle collaboration among rural advocates for fast, affordable, and reliable Internet.

For more information, please contact Edyael Casaperalta, at edyael@ruralstrategies.org
Visit us at <http://www.ruralassembly.org/working-groups/broadband>