**Before the New York Department of Public Service**

**Virtual Public Statement Hearings Regarding Broadband Internet Access**

**Statement of Annabel V. Felton - Chair, Duanesburg Broadband Committee**

**Wednesday, March 2, 2022**

Good afternoon. My name is Annabel Felton. I live in the Town of Duanesburg in western Schenectady County – about a half hour drive from Albany and Schenectady. I’m chair of the Duanesburg Broadband Committee which is a group of elected officials and community members formed in early 2018 to advocate for wired high-speed broadband service to every location in our Town. When the Committee was formed in early 2018, our first step was to create a Google map of all unserved locations in town. At the time, one third (1/3) of the town of about 2000 residents were not served with a wired broadband connection by any provider. Broadband Program Office Phase III grant funding helped reduce that number to 256 locations still unserved after builds were done by Pattersonville Telephone and with Verizon fiber.

Duanesburg is fortunate to have dedicated citizens and local officials who rallied to address the lack of broadband in our community. Countless hurdles face rural communities like ours. Incumbent providers hold franchises with density requirements that allow them to ignore us. However, many residents who filed complaints with the Public Service Commission after receiving exorbitant Contribution in Aid of Construction (CIACs) estimates, were heard. Ultimately, the PSC helped many of them receive long-overdue service.

Fast forward to September 2021- Charter/Spectrum completed its build under the settlement agreement with the PSC – and there are still about 60 locations unserved in Duanesburg. As I predicted in my statement before the Joint Hearing of the New York State Legislature in September 2019, Charter is now seeking funding to build out to every location remaining unserved in town. **Duanesburg needs ongoing grant funding to assure each of those locations is served with a wired broadband connection. If a location has power, it needs broadband connectivity. We need accurate, publicly available service maps and a plan – or universal service funds – so that new construction projects aren’t hit with CIACs of thousands or tens of thousands of dollars in unexpected utility construction charges.**

With respect to the specific topics listed in the notice for this hearing:

* Locations with broadband internet service at 25 Mbps /1 Mbps will be left on the wrong side of the digital divide. That speed is not adequate for business and school applications and the FCC and PSC should update the definition of minimum speeds. The Duanesburg Broadband Committee seeks new wired internet connections of 200/25 or faster and for good reason. Take it from me; I spent the entire pandemic with three people working and taking college classes from home on wireless cellular routers. Besides the inherent problem with data caps, Excel and other commonly used apps and VPNs don’t work when speeds slow to 25 Mbps download and 1 Mbps upload. You try it.
* I have no personal experience with service providing download speeds between 25 and 100, but the PSC should be expecting symmetrical speeds ASAP. Fiber backhaul is needed for 5G cellular anyway so stop wasting your time and our tax dollars on inferior service.
* I know of very few locations in the Town of Duanesburg where there is more than one wired provider. They are the few areas where Verizon overbuilt Charter/Spectrum using Broadband Program Office Phase 3 funding.
* High speed internet service is too costly for many people in my community. Folks on a fixed income or with low incomes simply can’t pay for wired services. People rely on cell phones or other wireless devices when wired connections are inconvenient or expensive. A robust communication system requires both wired and wireless service.

This is what I want you - my Department of **Public Service** - to take away from these comments:

1. Broadband service maps are critically important and should be publicly available;
2. Any location with electric service needs access to wired broadband service; and
3. CIACs, if they continue to exist, should be grant funded and not the responsibility of the homeowner.

Thank you for your time and attention.