

Access to High-Speed Internet

Safe deployment of high-speed internet services to unserved and underserved communities will create strong communities that are ready for the future.

The commonwealth, its local governments, telecommunications providers, business, agriculture, and all citizens have a stake in reliable, high-speed internet access. This critical infrastructure superhighway of the future is essential to giving Pennsylvania a strong foundation to deliver next-generation economic development, education, and health care. Safe and effective deployment in all communities will enhance quality of life and ensure that residents, new and long-standing, have great places to live, work, and raise families

Gov. Tom Wolf's creation of the Pennsylvania Office of Broadband Initiatives and the formation of the Broadband Caucus in the General Assembly are important steps showing that this issue has the attention of legislators.

According to the Federal Communications Commission, more than 800,000 Pennsylvanians lack any access to reliable, high-speed internet, with millions more not having the capacity needed now or in the future to be competitive socially, economically, or academically. Recent studies indicate that the FCC's numbers of unserved and underserved may be severely underestimated.

This lack of access leads to the inability to attract new businesses or retain existing businesses and prevents small business owners from operating and employees from having an option to work from home. Students are unable to complete homework assignments and are forced to miss out on educational opportunities due to lack of access. The inability of health care facilities to share important life-saving data can lead to inaccurate diagnoses of sick patients, as well as the improper treatment or care of patients.

PSATS supports the safe and orderly deployment of both wired and wireless broadband services throughout all areas of the commonwealth to provide reliable, high-speed internet access, which is a critical component for economic development, student achievement, quality health care, and the efficiency of local governments.

All levels of government — local, state, and federal — must work together with the business community, higher education, and broadband providers to close the growing digital divide. PSATS believes that township government is a critical partner to these efforts as local officials are intimately aware of the internet access that is available, and sorely lacking, in areas of their communities. ❖

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PENNSYLVANIA STATE ASSOCIATION OF TOWNSHIP SUPERVISORS

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