

Amory Proctor-CWA

As a Maryland-based cable splicing technician and Local Union officer for nearly forty years, representing hundreds of technicians, I have witnessed a significant shift in how the telecommunications industry responds to major service disruptions. When hurricane-strength derechos struck Maryland in past years, technicians from across the state were mobilized immediately to restore service. At that time, regulated telecommunications providers were required to meet specific service restoration standards. Unfortunately, those obligations do not apply in the same way to broadband-based services today.

During the devastating 2017 and 2019 California wildfires, sparked by power lines and responsible for widespread destruction and loss of life, CWA technicians reported widespread wireless system failures. Power outages, fire damage, and network congestion disrupted communications overnight while many residents were asleep. Traditional copper landline customers often continued receiving alerts due to centralized backup power, while many VoIP and wireless customers lost service. In many areas, internet access was unavailable when it was needed most.

Competition has not solved these problems or closed the digital divide. Decades of state and federal deregulation have left policymakers and the public with limited tools to hold broadband and wireless providers accountable for outages, unreliable service, and poorly maintained infrastructure. When internet or phone service fails, does not deliver advertised speeds, or otherwise falls short, consumers have little meaningful recourse.

For these reasons, the legislature should establish Public Service Commission oversight of broadband providers to restore accountability and ensure a watchdog over network resiliency, public safety, and consumer protection.

PSC oversight is essential to guarantee reliable communications during emergencies, including access to 911 and public safety answering points, as well as state and local emergency information websites. The Commission should also establish clear backup power requirements for VoIP and wireless networks. Fiber, coaxial, and wireless systems all depend on consistent power; without adequate backup power in the network and at customer premises, these services will fail.

Like water and electricity, broadband has become essential to daily life. It is time to restore meaningful oversight and ensure Maryland residents receive the reliable communications services they deserve.

Thank you.