



For Immediate Release

September 19, 2019

Contact: **Bill Esbeck, WSTA Executive Director**

Phone: **608-469-7171** Email: bill.esbeck@wsta.info

WSTA applauds Bipartisan Vote on Rural Broadband Investment Legislation

Madison, WI - Wisconsin's premier telecommunications industry association applauds today's Assembly Committee on Rural Development vote in support of Assembly Bill 344 (AB 344). The legislation facilitates rural broadband deployment through targeted tax exemptions for investments in rural or underserved communities.

"WSTA is extremely pleased to see a unanimous, bipartisan vote and recognize it as an important step in the process," said Bill Esbeck, executive director of the Wisconsin State Telecommunications Association (WSTA). "This legislation helps our members stretch their working capital in rural areas, where there are miles per customer as opposed to customers per mile. Simply put, the bill will help connect more broadband customers in rural and underserved Wisconsin."

Representative Romaine Quinn (R-Cameron) and Senator Howard Marklein (R-Spring Green) authored AB 344 and the companion bill, Senate Bill 321. The legislation creates property tax exemptions for telephone company property used to provide broadband service to a rural or underserved area. Unlike most Wisconsin property taxes, which are paid to local governments, the telephone company property tax is paid to the state. Because the telephone company property tax is collected by the state, there is no fiscal impact on local governments.

"WSTA is grateful for leadership on rural broadband issues from Representative Quinn, Senator Marklein and the Committee on Rural Development Chairperson Nancy VanderMeer (R-Tomah)," Esbeck continued. "We sincerely appreciate the unanimous, bipartisan support as we collaborate on policies which promote broadband deployment where the need is greatest."

The targeted exemption for new investments and existing investments is also a step toward a level playing field between cable companies and telephone companies. Cable companies in Wisconsin already enjoy a property tax exemption on the infrastructure they use to offer their voice, video and broadband triple play. A traditional telephone company offering the same voice, video and broadband triple play is currently paying the telephone company property tax on their infrastructure. This legislation helps level the competitive playing field.

The approach in AB 344 will complement existing state and federal programs focused on broadband deployment. Earlier this year, the Legislature approved, and Governor Evers signed an historic increase in funding for the Broadband Expansion Grant Program.

###