



Testimony

Mark Ouellette, CEO of Axiom Technologies, LLC.

Chairman Velázquez, Representative Golden - my Representative from the great State of Maine- and esteemed members of the Committee, thank you for the invitation to speak to you today as a rural small business located in the “Downeast” Maine. Washington County, where my business is located, is called the Sunrise County, because we are the eastern most county in the United States and the first to see the sunrise. Our county is 3 times the size of Rhode Island with a population of only 33,000 people. Our County sits within the largest Congressional District east of the Mississippi. Its big and very rural.

Axiom is an Internet Service Provider based in Machias, the County seat and a small business with seven employees. We have been providing internet service to some of the most difficult to reach homes in all of the United States for over 18 years. During that time, it has sometimes been a struggle to keep the doors open, but we have persevered knowing that for much of our early years we were the only company willing to deliver an internet connection, to some of the most difficult to reach homes in rural Maine. Many of our original customers are still with us today. Over time we have invested in variety of technologies and now are deploying – almost exclusively- fiber optic internet, commonly called Broadband.

Our company has taken advantage of several programs that were passed by Congress during the early days of the pandemic. And I come before you today as a small business with 7 fulltime and two part-time employees. Not only has pandemic relief kept all my employees working, but the funds from the Infrastructure Investment and Job’s Act earmarked for Broadband infrastructure investments- an amount estimated in Maine to be in the range of \$250M will help me grow my business exponentially over the next two years, while also adding additional employees. We expect to grow from a \$1M company to a \$5M company as the Broadband funding is deployed. And importantly, expect to offer healthcare to our employees for the first time. Something I have been trying to achieve for years but could not afford it.

I do not think it can be overstated how big the economic impact of this bill will have on the Maine economy. Not only is my company adding jobs and growing but the work we do will bring Broadband to 1000s of rural Maine homes.

It is simply a game changer.

In Washington County and across rural Maine, we experience the Digital Divide every day- those that do not have access to reliable, speedy internet are at a disadvantage. And the pandemic has exposed how important it is to make sure children can access the internet, Zoom with their teachers and complete homework assignments while at the same time allowing parents to work remotely. But the impact of Broadband access goes beyond that. They help elderly Mainers age in place by accessing telemedicine opportunities. One example- when we were able to bring internet service to one homeowner, he told us is that by having an internet connection, he could avoid traveling 3 times a week to the nearest health facility- 45 minutes each way to download the information on his medical monitoring device. Residents of Cranberry Isles- year-round islanders living off the coast of Maine connected by ferry to the mainland- now have the ability to work remotely for companies anywhere. A Professor of Physics from the University of Arizona will be able to work from his home in Roque Bluffs when we hook him up to a fiber connection later this year- a community with a population of 303.

The bill also addresses affordability- a roadblock for rural families struggling to pay their bills. The benefits provided in the bill will allow qualified individuals to access a subsidy to bring down the cost of their monthly internet bill by \$30- important to families struggling to make ends meet.

Internet access is critical to keeping rural places vibrant and ensuring that all Mainers can create their own economy.

The impact of the infrastructure bill in short will increase revenues at Axiom 5X, add employees and healthcare while providing world-class internet service to 1000s of homes that lack Broadband.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.