



March 3, 2015

(Via e-mail)

The Honorable Gary Howell, Chairman
House Government Organization Committee
West Virginia Legislature
State Capitol Complex
Charleston, WV 25305

RE: Senate Bill 576 (SB 576)

Dear Chairman Howell:

The Voice on the Net (VON) Coalition¹, which represents the nation's leading technology companies, including AT&T, Google, Microsoft, Skype and Vonage, writes to express its strong support for SB 576. In particular, we appreciate the proposal to maintain and codify West Virginia's current policy of non-regulation of Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) and other Internet-based communications services.

These services are a powerful force for increased competition, a platform for innovation, a key driver of broadband deployment and a vehicle for continued economic growth and consumer benefit. They are the next generation of communications applications — or “apps” — that are rapidly being deployed to meet consumer demand. In contrast to traditional, landline telephone service, VoIP and other Internet-based communications services are broadband services that utilize Internet Protocol (IP) technology — which changes the contents of the communication into digital packets and sends them over the fastest available route over the Internet. By utilizing IP technology, these services provide an integrated suite of capabilities and features for consumers to communicate by voice, data and/or video, and to manage their communications dynamically. These features and capabilities far exceed those of traditional, landline telephone service.

VoIP and other Internet-based communications services are driving economic growth and broadband adoption throughout the state, which in turn drive the growth of “apps” and the devices that enable consumers to use them, which in turn drives the deployment of broadband networks which these apps and devices utilize. This “virtuous cycle” of

¹ The Voice on the Net or VON Coalition consists of leading VoIP companies, on the cutting edge of developing and delivering voice innovations over the Internet. The coalition works to advance regulatory policies that enable Americans to take advantage of the full promise and potential of VoIP. The Coalition believes that with the right public policies, Internet based voice advances can make talking more affordable, businesses more productive, jobs more plentiful, the Internet more valuable, and Americans more safe and secure. Since its inception, the VON Coalition has promoted pragmatic policy choices for unleashing VoIP's potential. <http://www.von.org>



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economic growth and consumer adoption will create good, high-tech jobs as West Virginia continues to work its way out of these difficult economic times.

That is why policymakers in 29 other states and the District of Colombia have adopted similar legislation to ensure that VoIP and other Internet-based communications services remain free from patchwork state “utility” regulation. Today, no state regulates VoIP and other Internet-based communications services, including the Public Service Commission of West Virginia. The bill codifies and maintains this policy.

West Virginia should not get left behind. We respectfully urge you to join these other, forward-looking states and adopt this important legislation, to promote the virtuous cycle of economic growth and job creation that the broadband ecosystem fosters.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

The VON Coalition

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cc: Members of the House Government Organization Committee