

NJ Board of Public Utilities
44 South Clinton Avenue, 9th Floor
Post Office Box 350
Trenton, New Jersey 08625-0350

June 30, 2020

RE: Docket No. CM20030211

Dear Members of the NJ Board of Public Utilities,

I am writing to you today on behalf of the residents of Hardwick Township in Warren County regarding the Service Electric/ Altice Cable Television Transaction merger referenced above.

The Board of Public Utilities is the sole regulator whose consent is required for this transaction and is involved because it concerns cable services. However, any expansion of existing cable lines, in effect, also increases Internet. At present, hundreds of homes in Hardwick Township have service that fails to meet the federal definition for high speed Internet. Our town's previous attempts to negotiate an extension of Service Electric lines, which would have resulted in more homes having high speed Internet, have been unsuccessful. To my knowledge, Service Electric has not extended a single line in Hardwick Township for over 15 years.

The current petition before the BPU makes assurance of "improved service" to twenty-eight NJ "communities" and promises greater speeds to existing customers. However, this fails to address the core problem in rural Northwest New Jersey; the availability of reliable high speed internet in this geographic location. The issue in this case is not that Service electric is providing slow or unreliable internet service in this area, it is that very few homes have access to Service Electric at all. The existing cable/Internet lines are few and far between. The current Altice petition does not offer any clarity on that. ***We therefore ask that the Board of Public Utilities not approve this petition without specific commitment from Altice to extend cable lines (which also enables Internet service) in our town.***

Hardwick Township has had two calls with the attorney for Altice and have presented him with information he requested pertaining to a specific road in Hardwick. To-date, Altice has not offered any response or commitment of any kind.

The need for better Internet is critical and obvious: The closing of schools and businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the existing broadband problem. Students, home businesses and residents are overwhelming the capabilities of the existing Century Link system which underperforms on a consistent basis. That reality and the refusal of Service Electric to expand their delivery capability in this area means that Northwest NJ has some of the worst internet service in the U.S. Realtors continually cite poor Internet service as a major reason that prospective buyers choose homes outside of our town. Why buy a home here with poor internet when you can buy one 20 miles east of here with reliable high speed service ?

I request that the BPU withhold approval for this transaction until specific concessions on extension of cable lines are made. This is our town's only means for effecting change; we have no leverage with which to require expansions of service. Hardwick Township refused to sign the most recent contract agreement between the North Warren municipalities and Service Electric because the density requirements were so stringent that very few, if any homes in town, would qualify. In addition, their hook up fees are so costly as to be prohibitive. As an example, to run a line to connect to the Hardwick Municipal Building (a distance of about one half mile) Service Electric gave us a quote of \$17,000 to \$30,000. Despite several meetings over the years with Service Electric where we discussed our requests, the only result has been no action and no follow-up. Every interaction we had with them was initiated by us and those meetings resulted in zero improvements of any kind. For these reasons, I ask the BPU to use this opportunity to procure concessions from Altice for the residents of Northwest New Jersey.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Kevin Duffy

Mayor – Hardwick Township