

VMDABC

The Rural Fiber Association

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NEW: VMDABC Responds to Association of American Railroads Lawsuit Impeding Construction and Deployment of Broadband in Virginia

Overwhelmingly popular law will expedite the construction of broadband fiber

“Broadband serves as the bridge that connects all Virginians to the 21st century. This lawsuit demonstrates that railroad companies are dismissing the Virginians who are often overlooked and left behind – the ones who are still waiting for internet connectivity. Railroad corporations should not be standing in the way of innovation, progress and growth.”

RICHMOND, VA — Last week, the Association of American Railroads filed a [lawsuit](#) further impeding the construction and deployment of broadband throughout Virginia. Today, the Virginia Maryland Delaware Association of Broadband Cooperatives (VMDABC) is responding and laying out what is at stake for the 200,000 Virginians waiting for broadband access.

bureaucratic process to build broadband fiber infrastructure and provide broadband access to 200,000 Virginians. The bill was quickly signed into law by Governor Youngkin on March 27, 2023.

Virginia has invested \$1 billion for broadband deployment through the VATI program to close the digital divide and deploy broadband across the Commonwealth with more on the way. Virginia's Broadband Cooperatives are establishing Virginia as a leader nationwide because of their work delivering broadband to our communities, especially underserved communities.

VMDABC issued the following statements in response to the Association of American Railroads lawsuit:

Sen. Bill Stanley:

“While the recent actions of the railroads are disappointing, I am not surprised by this new litigation, because the railroads engaged in bullying our Virginia broadband companies that were seeking a fair and equitable solution to this problem during the 2023 legislative session. We crafted a bill through many drafts that addressed all of their needs, but nothing was ever going to be good enough for them.

“In my opinion, Norfolk Southern abandoned Southside and Southwest Virginia years ago, causing significant economic harm to the region. It is ironic indeed that they are now doing everything that they can to prevent economic revitalization here that depends on the installation of fiber optic cable in the very region that they abandoned not so long ago. I am confident that the broadband initiative we have created with this legislation will be found to be right, just, and more importantly, constitutional.”

"This fiber optic cable needs to get in the ground now. We have time limits on the state and federal funds to be utilized in this process, and they don't care about the people who need it most. This is about greed to them, not about doing what is right for the poorest regions in the Commonwealth. They don't care, and they are oblivious to how bad this makes them look — to ignore the very people who helped build their industry.

“Perhaps the railroad should focus on keeping their trains out of our rivers, rather than focusing so much needless attention on keeping fiber out of our homes and schools here in Virginia.”

Delegate Chris Head:

“The importance of this legislation cannot be overstated, and it is disappointing that railroad corporations are taking legal actions to prevent closing the digital divide for 200,000 Virginians without broadband access. Growing up in rural Georgia, I know firsthand what life is like without technology. There was no cable TV, no air

of the REA and the service provided by our member owned electric cooperative.

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VMDABC Chair Casey Logan:

“We applaud the efforts of our General Assembly members and Governor Youngkin for working together to recognize the importance and take swift action to ensure that every Virginia family is connected to broadband and that railroad crossings are accomplished safely, in accordance with relevant regulations. This law tackles the inadequate and bureaucratic administrative system that is preventing us from connecting Virginians and the exorbitant fees that waste taxpayer money – a crossing simply should not take a year or more to complete. Without the work of our legislators, stakeholders and coalition members, Virginians would have to continue to wait to get access to telemedicine, remote working opportunities, virtual education, new technologies and so much more.

“Cooperatives are committed to getting the work done and delivering for our members — and we look forward to partnering with all those as committed as we are to delivering broadband to the remaining 200,000 Virginians who lack it.”

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