

ORAL STATEMENT OF MIKE WILSON, Senior Director of Government Affairs
Connecting Urban and Rural America: The State of Communications on the Ground
Little Rock, Arkansas
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Good Morning, my name is Mike Wilson and I'm the Senior Director of Government Affairs for Comcast of Arkansas based here in Little Rock.

Comcast provides video, broadband, phone and home security services in central Arkansas and in the West Memphis area.

Since 1996, Comcast has invested over 206 million dollars in system upgrades to make sure our Arkansas customers have access to the same programming and technology choices available anywhere in the country.

Our core video offering, XFINITY TV, now leverages IP technology and cloud-based servers to deliver an enormous library of video content... when, where, and on whatever devices our customers choose. Our new entertainment platform, which we call X1, integrates social media, search, and third-party applications to redefine the viewing experience.

But even with all of these choices and capabilities that the cable industry offers, when it comes to broadband, there are still too many Americans who are on the wrong side of the digital divide.

Nationwide, the average broadband take-rate is something like 67 or 68 percent. That puts almost a third of Americans – many of whom live below the poverty line – on the wrong side of the digital divide. As a result, they face profound disadvantages in getting access to a quality education, employment opportunities, news and entertainment, and the kind of health, educational, and financial information that is essential for all of us.

There are a number of programs here in Arkansas that the cable industry has implemented to address the barriers to broadband adoption.

Cable companies like Cox, Suddenlink and Conway Corp., in addition to others, partner in Connect 2 Compete, which provides low cost Internet access to families who have children participating in the Free School Lunch Program.

Comcast's program, called Internet Essentials, is the nation's largest and most comprehensive broadband adoption program. It provides low-cost broadband service for \$9.95 a month plus tax; the option to purchase a Comcast-subsidized Internet-ready computer for under \$150; and multiple options to access free digital literacy training in print, online, and in-person. Eligible families must have at least one child eligible to participate in the Free or Reduced School Lunch Programs, including public, parochial, private, and homeschool students.

Since Comcast introduced Internet Essentials, only 22 months ago, we have connected more than 220,000 families or nearly 900,000 low-income Americans to the power of the Internet in their homes, most for the very first time.

To put that in perspective, 900,000 people is about the size of Jacksonville, FL or San Francisco, CA – or the combined populations of Miami and Atlanta. When you are successful in connecting the equivalent of entire cities to the Internet, you are making real and meaningful progress to help close the digital divide in America.

In Arkansas alone, Comcast has connected over 750 low income families. That's over 3,000 Arkansans who now benefit from the access to the Internet.

While Internet Essentials continues to grow, we know there is more work to be done. That is why we have sought to continuously improve the Internet Essentials program every year. Earlier this year, we made a series of announcements that expanded the program's eligible population to parochial, private, cyberschool, and homeschooled students; launched a new online enrollment tool available in English and Spanish through any Internet-enabled computer, tablet, or smartphone; and introduced Internet Essentials Opportunity Cards, a resource that partners can use to connect eligible families to the Internet at home even faster.

This year we announced we will increase the broadband speeds for Internet Essentials customers for the second time in two years. Starting on September 1, we are increasing the download speed to 5 Mbps and the upload speed to 1 Mbps. This is triple the download speed than when we first started the program in 2011 when we offered a 1.5 Mbps connection, and a 67 percent increase from the current speed of 3 Mbps. This speed increase will enable Internet Essentials families to enjoy a faster connection to conduct

research, download assignments, access social media, submit college and job applications, and enjoy entertainment. We also streamlined enrollment in the program again by expanding the instant approval process for families whose students attend schools where 70 percent or more of the students are eligible to participate in the National School Lunch Program so that now even more families can take advantage of this program.

Comcast did not accomplish our two year results alone. We have partnered with all of our school districts; non-profits organizations like the Boys and Girls clubs; Big Brothers/Big Sisters and many faith based organizations to help get the word out and assist with our training. All of these organizations have played a significant role the program's success.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify and share information about what the telecommunications industry is doing to expand broadband adoption in Arkansas.