



March 18, 2024

Re: SF4742 (McEwen) / HF4659 (Berg)

Chair Frentz and Members of the Energy, Utilities, Environment, and Climate Committee,

The Communications Workers of America strongly supports HF4659 (Berg)/SF 4742 (McEwen), “Safety standards for broadband industry installers required; and Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Program implemented.” CWA represents workers across the country in the communications and information industries, and thousands of working families in Minnesota.

With unprecedented federal funding, Minnesota has a once-in-a-generation opportunity to close the digital divide and build high speed broadband to unserved and underserved areas. We need to ensure that this historic investment creates long-lasting future-proof infrastructure, built by a well-trained workforce. Work performed by poorly trained low road players endangers the public and leads to shoddy work that fails to stand the test of time.

SF4742/HF4659 would promote good labor standards in publicly funded broadband work, requiring DEED to prioritize good jobs, family-sustaining benefits, and a well-trained workforce in its publicly funded broadband programs. The bill ensures that DEED can collect the information it needs to evaluate applicants’ workforce plans and hold grantees accountable to their workforce commitments. The bill also introduces safety standards for underground telecommunications work.

We have already seen the effects of unsafe broadband work - explosions, cut utility lines, danger to workers and the public, and poor service quality. Without labor measures, this unprecedented broadband funding will only exacerbate these problems and most importantly, fail to create the lasting network we need to connect unserved Minnesotans. We must ensure that public dollars for broadband promote good jobs, safety, and the well-trained workforce necessary to create a high-quality network that will stand the test of time.

We urge you to support SF4742/HF4659 and are happy to discuss further.

Sincerely,

Misty Robertson
National Broadband Lead