



On behalf of the 70,000 skilled construction workers represented by the unions affiliated with the Minnesota Building and Construction Trades Council, I am writing to share our strong opposition to weakening safety standards and accountability for broadband installation. Senate File 908 undermines the Broadband Worker Safety legislation passed by the Legislature in 2024 that establishes minimum qualifications for safety-sensitive positions and supports the development of skilled local workforce.

Unions affiliated with the Minnesota Building Trades represent men and women who build every part of Minnesota's transportation, water and energy infrastructure – from highways and bridges to underground electric and gas distribution lines. Our members use skills learned on the job and through best-in-class training and apprenticeship programs to build infrastructure that is safe and reliable. In return, our contractor partners pay family-supporting wages and benefits necessary for our members to pursue construction as a career, not just a job.

Minnesota Building Trades and our contractor partners are all too aware of the growing crisis in broadband installation. After all, it is union tradesmen and tradeswomen who build the underground gas, electric and other municipal infrastructure that is vulnerable to unsafe broadband installation practices, and who must repair the infrastructure after it has been damaged.

Minnesota maintains high standards in every other area of infrastructure construction – both for the quality of the work and the quality of the resulting jobs. Minnesota's public infrastructure is built with prevailing wage protections that provide a level playing field and encourage contractors to invest in a skilled workforce rather than participate in a race-to-the-bottom. Meanwhile, Minnesota's private energy infrastructure is closely regulated, and both investor- owned and cooperative utilities have similar incentives to invest in high-quality workforce and work.

Unfortunately, the cable and broadband industry is the exception. Broadband providers resist being held to basic standards that apply to other types of critical infrastructure. While contractors who install gas and water lines are required to meet minimum workforce qualifications, an industry whose contractors operate drills around – and sometimes straight through those lines – rejects proposed minimum qualifications designed to prevent a catastrophic incident.

There is no reason we should not keep our increasingly vital broadband infrastructure on a similar path by maintaining minimum training standards, holding broadband providers accountable for their contracting practices, and incentivizing best practices.

It is time for Minnesota to treat broadband as critical infrastructure, not only by investing in deployment of fiber to every home and business in the state, but also by holding the industry accountable to the same standards as other infrastructure operators and recipients of public funds. We urge you to oppose Senate File 908 which will make Minnesota workers and communities less safe and risk public and utility infrastructure.

Thank you,

Tom Dicklich, Executive Director