

Issue Brief
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Local control over telecommunications must be preserved

Public power utilities, including Public Utility Districts in Washington, were created in many states early last century to provide electricity to rural areas whose needs were not being met by investor-owned utilities.

Today, the same dynamic is being played out in telecommunications, where rural areas and small towns are being underserved by private companies, creating a well-documented “digital divide.”

Unfortunately, many states currently prohibit public power from providing telecommunications services, including broadband access to the Internet.

In Washington, PUDs are limited to providing wholesale telecommunications.

WPUDA believes that PUDs are positioned to provide advanced telecommunications in areas that investor-owned companies view as unprofitable, much as they did for rural electrification in the 20th century.

Responding to possible changes in state regulations, and requests from lawmakers that PUDs be part of the process, the WPUDA Board of Directors in January adopted a resolution seeking “full and unfettered” telecommunications authority for PUDs.

While the provision of telecommunications services is essentially a state issue, because of major technological advances in recent years, Congress is expected this year to revisit the Telecommunications Act of 1996.



It is essential that Congress not enact unfair policies that impede the ability of PUDs to provide communities with advanced telecommunications services.

Congress should ensure that PUDs and other municipalities continue to have local, decision-making control over the services they provide to their residents.

Several studies have recently concluded that high-speed information networks are as important to a community’s economic development and quality of life as a good transportation system.

As locally regulated utilities, accountable to the voters, PUDs have the ability to ensure that rural and underserved areas of the state are not left behind in access to education, health care, and other benefits of broadband communications.