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Alaska Satellite Internet

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Subject: Support for HB 37

ATTN: 2019 Alaska State Legislature

Regulation can be an important tool to promote the common welfare and to help ensure public safety. On the other hand regulation can be oppressive, when it is not flexible to the actual financial and logistical needs of the people it is supposed to serve.

For over twelve years now, our local Alaskan company (owned and operated from Fairbanks) has been providing satellite internet service in one form or another to nearly the entire state of Alaska. We now have beam coverage options over the entire geography of the state, even the Aleutian Islands. We have been able to provide internet to individuals, families, small businesses, and large projects in some of the most remote locations in Alaska. There are huge ranges of the state that would have had access to literally *no* internet options (or in some cases, very poor ones) if we would not have been there to provide them with service. Since Alaska is such a huge state, with such difficult logistics, the only thing that has made this possible is our ability to train and to use the local and regional talent required to take care of the “boots on the ground” part of the operation. They are not our employees and work as independent agents doing work for the customer, with our company providing the equipment and installation support.

The people who do this installation work are never making a full time living from it. The geography, population density, and seasonal constraints of Alaska just don't make that feasible throughout most of the state. Most of them are hard working individuals with a regular day job, or in many cases are otherwise very busy with subsistence living or village government responsibilities. Often they do this work simply to make a few extra dollars on the weekend, and sometimes even just to help out needy families in the community.

These are people who don't have the time, money, or interest to keep up with contractor licensing paperwork and requirements. And they most certainly aren't going to devote years to becoming an electrical administrator, so that they can sign off on their own work. They already need to sit through hours and hours of operational and safety training videos from our network vendors, and that alone stretches the limit of the investment they are able to make, to offset the small returns.

What are the alternatives for remote Alaskans? They could fly in an expensive installer from Anchorage (plus an electrical administrator to watch him do the work). That might work, if that Bush family in their remote cabin can afford to pay four or five times as much as they would pay for their local contact to take care of the work. Oh, and by the way, the family might need to wait six or seven months, to see if some more orders come along in the same place, as the contractor is not likely to make such a major trip for a single install.

Our company is owned and managed by licensed amateur radio operators, and people who have worked in the power generation industry. We understand the need for regulations and for public safety. But regulation gets ridiculous when we are dealing with installations that involve little more than attaching a satellite dish, laying out a transmission cable, plugging a modem into a (grounded and tested) wall socket, and attaching the radio to building ground. (The latter requirement is rumored to disappear in a future NEC revision, as it tends to cause more problems than it solves.) Do we really need a journeyman electrical administrator on site? Where are all the dozens, or even the single small handful, of people that have been hurt or even put in danger by an improperly installed satellite internet system?

Is this a solution in search of a problem? Or perhaps the regulation isn't really about safety and protecting the public. Maybe it is about keeping competition down, limited to the companies that can afford to keep up with the regulation.

We support HB 37, which provides a much-needed exemption in current contractor and electrical regulation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'CH', written over a horizontal line.

Christopher Howard

On behalf of Alaska Satellite Internet in Fairbanks