



September 22, 2020 - City of Cincinnati Equity, Inclusion, Youth, & the Arts Committee
Public Comments – Jason Kershner, Director Government Affairs

Good afternoon, Chairman Seelbach, Vice Chair Landsman and members of the Equity, Inclusion, Youth, & the Arts Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Jason Kershner and I am the Director of Government Affairs for Charter Communications.

In case you're not familiar with Charter, we are a broadband connectivity company and cable operator with more than 30 million customer relationships in 41 states. Through our Spectrum brand, Charter offers a full range of state-of-the-art residential broadband services to our customers, including Spectrum Internet, TV, Mobile and Voice. For larger businesses and government entities, Spectrum Enterprise provides highly customized, fiber-based solutions, and our company also distributes award-winning news coverage to our customers through Spectrum Networks.

More than 95,000 Charter employees support the products and services delivered over more than 750,000 miles of network infrastructure, which passes 52 million homes and powers more than 300 million wireless devices across the country.

In Ohio, Charter has 2.4 million customer relationships, and more than 7,500 of my colleagues and I are based in communities, large and small, across the state. In fact, the Cincinnati area is a key employment hub for us, with about 1,500 employees living and/or working in Cincinnati, Blue Ash, Clifton, West Chester, Green Township and Pleasant Ridge. Powered, in part, by these 1,500 Cincinnati-area employees, Spectrum services are available to nearly all residents throughout the city of Cincinnati and virtually all of Hamilton County.

But Charter is about more than delivering best-in-class products and services to our customers. Our company is committed to improving communities and impacting lives where our customers and employees live and work. That includes our commitment to diversity and inclusion in all aspects of the business. Forty-seven percent of Charter's workforce is diverse as our company strives to leverage the full diversity of our employees and partners to make a meaningful difference.

As part of this effort, Charter has developed signature philanthropic and engagement programs to improve local communities we serve.

Through Spectrum Housing Assist, we partner with nonprofit organizations and engage our employee and community volunteers to provide critical home repairs for those in need of a helping hand. Our goal is to improve 50,000 homes by the end of 2020. In 2019 we participated in Mayor Cranley's Give One for Cincy initiative by repairing local homes in the Carthage neighborhood in partnership with People Working Cooperatively.

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Spectrum Digital Education supports nonprofit organizations that educate community members on the benefits of broadband and how to use it to improve their lives. Charter launched this program in 2017 and has since committed to awarding \$6 million in cash grants and in-kind donations to support broadband education.

The Spectrum Employee Community Grant program allows Charter employees to nominate nonprofit organizations that they personally support. While this program is still fairly new, in just the past year our employees have driven additional resources to Hope's Closet and the Shephard's Place in the Cincinnati area.

With our programming partners, we've brought unique and exclusive national events to the city. In 2018, we partnered with the Ovation Network to present a Stand for the Arts Award to the Cincinnati Song Initiative.

Over the years, Cincinnati has been a strong partner with us in our effort to make a difference, and we are proud of the investments we continue to make in this community.

As everyone knows, the COVID-19 pandemic has altered our worlds and magnified broadband adoption challenges across our country. Now more than ever, Charter's products and services have proven critical to the country's continued operation, ensuring our customers can work and learn remotely, stay informed and keep connected with loved ones.

We are proud to have been able to offer extensive support to our customers when they needed it most while also delivering uninterrupted access during a record-breaking spike in demand. These efforts were made possible by significant investments in and expansions of our network infrastructure and technology, which totaled nearly \$40 billion over the past five years – with nearly a billion of that invested in Ohio alone in just the last two years. (*data as of Dec. 31, 2019*)

And as our world – and the communities we serve – continue to cope with the new challenges presented by COVID-19, we are here to be a part of the solution, working alongside elected officials and community leaders like you to help close the Digital Divide.

As you may know, Charter has done our part to help to ease the strain on millions of Americans by: connecting nearly 450,000 students, teachers, and their families to up to 100Mbps broadband service for 60 days at no charge; keeping approximately 700,000 customers connected when they had a hard time paying bills because of COVID-related economic hardship; forgiving \$85 million in customers' overdue balances; partnering with the National Urban League and the National Action Network on a \$10 million investment to increase low-interest capital to support Black and other minority-owned small businesses in underserved communities; donating \$12 million in airtime to run COVID-related public service announcements; and opening Spectrum News websites to increase access to local news and information.

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Just yesterday, Charter announced a relaunch of its Remote Education Offer providing free Spectrum Internet – with speeds up to 200 Mbps in most markets – and WiFi access for 60 days to households with K-12th graders, college students and/or educators.

Additionally, Charter supported its employees by adopting a \$20 per hour starting wage process with an immediate \$1.50 raise for hourly employees. Charter also has provided an additional three weeks of flex time for COVID-19 related reasons and additional support for employees and their families who have high-risk health conditions or challenges with school and child care closures.

Finally, we continue to work with our customers to find a plan that matches their needs and budget, including for qualified households, our affordable low-income broadband service, Spectrum Internet Assist. This service is available to seniors (65+ years old) who receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits, as well as households that qualify for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) or the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) of the NSLP, which includes the majority of Cincinnati Public Schools students.

Spectrum Internet Assist offers 30 Mbps download speeds for \$17.99 per month, with no modem fees, data caps or contracts. We have extensively promoted Spectrum Internet Assist since its introduction more than three years ago, including through direct marketing to pre-qualified households in Cincinnati and throughout the country. We have also streamlined the Spectrum Internet Assist application process to make it easier than ever for low-income families and seniors to get connected, including providing a dedicated toll-free number for pre-qualified households to call to sign up, and ensuring our customer service team is equipped to translate inquiries in 200 languages.

Because of these efforts, and others, we were honored to have recently had our company's response to the COVID-19 pandemic recognized by *Forbes* as one of the best in the nation.

But we know there's more work to be done.

As our schools work to implement distance learning programming, our Spectrum Enterprise team has developed the Stay Connected K-12 service to specifically address the need to connect more students to online learning opportunities. This service is designed to deploy quickly so students have the robust, reliable and stable connectivity they need to provide an effective online learning experience.

Most importantly, this is a turnkey solution because our network is built in Cincinnati and available to nearly all residents today. Schools in our service footprint – whether public, private, parochial or charter – can leverage our existing network to get service to currently unconnected student homes. That takes the deployment, management and support off the shoulders of the schools.

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For just \$29.99 per month per household – which is an all-in price guaranteed through the term of the agreement with the school district – Stay Connected K-12 provides fast, reliable wired connections to students, while ensuring predictable costs for school leaders.

This solution's 50 Mbps download and 5 Mbps upload speeds support video-intensive remote learning and other collaboration applications used by educators and students. Additionally, the monthly cost includes in-home Wi-Fi, which allows multiple students and others in the household to be connected at the same time. Finally, with Stay Connected K-12, there are no data plans, no metered usage, no data caps and no bandwidth throttling.

Thank you all again for your time today and the work you're doing to help close the Digital Divide. Charter is a dedicated partner in this effort and we look forward to continuing our work with you into the future.

At this time, I'd be happy to take any questions.