TOWN OF HEATH

MASSACHUSETTS

SELECT BOARD

November 19, 2026

Wireless Competition Bureau
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20053

RE: Opposition to the Retirement of Traditional Copper Telephone Lines by Verizon and the Impact on Rural Communities

Dear Commissioners,

On behalf of the Select Board, Board of Health, and Council on Aging of Heath, Massachusetts, I am writing to express concern and opposition to Verizon's plans to abandon traditional copper telephone landlines. While advancements in telecommunications technology may offer convenience and new capabilities, the proposed elimination of copper-based telephone service raises serious concerns about public safety, emergency preparedness, accessibility, and the well-being of elderly and vulnerable residents, particularly in rural communities such as Heath, Massachusetts. For hill town communities like ours, traditional landlines are not outdated conveniences; they are an essential lifeline.

Rural Communities Cannot Afford to Lose This Critical Safety Net

In absence of copper analogue landlines, reliable cellular service cannot be taken for granted, in rural areas. Cell coverage is often limited, inconsistent, or nonexistent in certain locations due to mountainous terrain. During severe weather, heavy snowfall, ice storms, high winds, downed trees, and other emergencies residents can lose electricity. Cell towers can lose power or become damaged leaving residents without cellular service for days on end.

Traditional copper telephone lines provide an important measure of protection during these circumstances. Unlike modern Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) telephone services, traditional copper landlines carry their own low-voltage electrical power supplied from the telephone company's central office. These central offices are typically equipped with industrial backup batteries and generators, allowing telephone service to continue during many household power outages, some outlasting the potential eight hours of backup power provided by alternative telecommunication options.

In comparison to copper analogue landlines, VoIP services depend on electricity at the customer's home to power the modem, router, and telephone equipment. When household power is lost, telephone service is also lost unless the homeowner has a backup power system. In a rural community where not every household has a generator or sufficient battery backup, this situation

could leave residents without any dependable means of communicating beyond their homes during an emergency. For some residents, this could have life-threatening consequences.

The Impact on Elderly Residents and People Who Depend on Emergency Systems

The proposed elimination of copper lines is especially concerning to us for our older adults, seniors, and individuals who rely on technology to maintain their independence and safety.

Many existing systems depend on traditional analog telephone connections, including:

- Home security and burglar alarm systems.
- Medical alert systems and Life Alert devices.
- Elevator emergency telephone connections.
- Residential and municipal fax machines.
- Other emergency communication equipment designed to operate through traditional analog telephone lines.

These systems were installed with the expectation that reliable landline service would remain available. They may not function properly, or at all, when connected to digital telephone alternatives such as VoIP or cellular-based services.

Our Rural Communities Deserve Reliable Access to Communication

The ability to communicate during an emergency should not depend on whether someone can afford a generator, has reliable cellular coverage, understands digital technology, or can afford to replace essential equipment. Many of our senior residents are not comfortable with, or capable of navigating, the technological changes associated with digital telephone services.

While we acknowledge that telecommunications technology continues to evolve, modernization should not come at the expense of public safety or leave vulnerable populations behind. We would like to ensure that our residents, particularly our elderly and residents of high risk, are not left without a dependable way to call for help.

We respectfully urge the Federal Communications Commission to thoughtfully evaluate the impact of Verizon's proposed copper network retirement, particularly in rural communities where alternative communication services may not provide the same level of reliability. We feel it imperative that copper service be retained in rural communities like Heath and the surrounding hill towns where replacement technologies cannot demonstrate emergency reliability.

Sincerely,

Mia Francesconi, Town Coordinator
Office of the Select Board

cc: Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Public Utilities
Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Telecommunications & Cable
Verizon Wireless HQ, Dispute Resolution Manager