



May 20, 2025

TO: Chair John Spiros and Members
Assembly Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety

RE: **Support for AB 242 As Amended by Assembly Amendment 1**

Dear Chair Spiros and Members,

On behalf of CTIA®, the trade association for the wireless communications industry, I am writing in support of AB 242, as amended by Assembly Amendment 1, related to improved protections for broadband and wireless infrastructure in Wisconsin.

At a time of exploding consumer demand for wireless services, when wireless connectivity is important to public safety, health care and the economy, our industry is working hard to deploy infrastructure for Wisconsin communities. In 2023, the wireless industry invested \$30 billion in private funding to improve connectivity for consumers. These investments support consumers and fuel economic growth in Wisconsin, where the wireless industry employs approximately 53,000 residents and contributes \$4.7 billion to the state's GDP annually. However, ongoing criminal theft and vandalism of telecommunications and broadband infrastructure puts this progress at risk.

In recent years, a variety of factors have led to a significant uptick in theft of copper and engineering equipment and destruction of telecommunications and broadband assets in Wisconsin and across the nation. In 2024 alone, nearly 4,000 incidents of theft and vandalism were reported between June and August. While attention has focused on the price and resulting theft of copper, these incidents are increasingly impacting all types of telecommunications and broadband infrastructure. Perpetrators steal batteries and power cables from wireless towers and small cell sites, cut copper and other communication lines, and willfully and intentionally destroy wireless sites and fiber optic lines.

The impacts of these incidents are broad-ranging and significant. Disruption of 911 systems and public safety communications can delay emergency response times, especially in rural communities. Our health care networks heavily depend on broadband connectivity for patient care, access to medical records, medical devices and telemedicine services. Our transportation systems – airports, railways and highways – depend on connectivity. In recent years, all of these sectors and many others have been directly impacted by telecommunications and broadband vandalism, leading to both economic losses and increased risks to public health and safety.

As you know, AB 242 would broaden the types of telecommunications equipment protected from tampering under state law as well as extend criminal penalties for any such tampering or intentional damage to include broadband infrastructure. While we support the goals of AB 242, we strongly recommend adoption of Assembly Amendment 1 to explicitly add wireless telecommunications equipment to the bill as well. Doing so will further improve the impact of this bill.

Given the ongoing impacts of these incidents and our members' commitment to continue improving connectivity in Wisconsin communities, we strongly support this legislation.

Sincerely,
Jeremy Crandall
Assistant Vice President, State Legislative Affairs