



**Testimony of  
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CTIA**

**In Support of  
Rhode Island H 7173**

**February 3, 2026**

On behalf of CTIA®, the trade association for the wireless communications industry, I am testifying in support of H 7173 related to improved protections for telecommunications critical infrastructure.

At a time of exploding consumer demand for wireless services, our industry is working hard to deploy and upgrade infrastructure for Rhode Island communities. In 2024, the wireless industry invested \$29 billion in private funding to maintain and upgrade wireless networks, and approximately \$220 billion since 2018. These investments support consumers and fuel economic growth in the state, where the wireless industry employs approximately 10,000 residents and contributes \$1 billion to the state's GDP annually. However, ongoing criminal theft and vandalism of telecommunications infrastructure puts this progress at risk.

In recent years, a variety of factors have led to a significant uptick in the theft of copper and engineering equipment and destruction of telecommunications and broadband assets in Rhode Island and across the nation. During a one-year period in 2024-25, nearly 16,000 incidents of theft and vandalism were reported. While attention has focused on the price and resulting theft of copper, these incidents are impacting all types of wireless 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, and the ability of residents to reach 911 operators. 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, H 7173 would make important improvements to the state statutes governing the protection of telecommunications equipment in the state. The bill would add telecommunications materials and equipment to the state's utilities and scrap metal laws and improve providers' ability to strengthen protective security at telecommunications sites. Given the ongoing impacts of these incidents and our members' commitment to continue enhancing connectivity in Rhode Island communities, we strongly support H 7173.