

**Testimony of
Michael Simmonds, Assistant Business Manager
International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers
Philadelphia Local 126**

**Before the Pennsylvania House Consumer Affairs Committee
Consumer Protection, Technology and Utilities Subcommittee
Pennsylvania House of Representatives**

1:00 p.m.

Room G50

August 21, 2023

Chairman Matzie, Chairman Marshall, and Members of the House Consumer Protection, Technology and Utilities Subcommittee, on behalf of Philadelphia Local 126 Business Manager Richard Muttik and 6,000 IBEW members across the state working for utility contractors, investor-owned, municipal utilities and telecommunications and cable companies. My name is Michael Simmonds and I am assistant business manager of IBEW Local 126. For the record, I have submitted this testimony with some additional background information about the IBEW and its membership.

Thank you for inviting me to share the IBEW perspective on proposed legislation that would direct the Public Utilities Commission to establish rules governing the timely removal of excess utility poles. This hearing's topic is vital to the safety of anyone working around utility poles as well as the public at large.

Background

Local 126's jurisdiction includes the southern half of Pennsylvania. We represent contractors performing line work for electrical utilities like PPL, Metropolitan Edison, Duquesne Light and PECO, among others, as well as telecommunications companies like Verizon and cable and internet providers like Comcast and Crown Castle.

The state's existing electric distribution and telecommunications infrastructure delivers power and communications to consumers along thousands of miles of lines. The anticipated broadband buildout will add significantly to this hardware network.

IBEW members are employed in every aspect of the physical infrastructure in the utility and telecommunications industries, including working as line and ground workers, technicians, equipment operators, mechanics as well as substation linemen and communication technicians.

Delivering electric power and communications services can be hazardous work. Our members know the system and the risks, better than anyone. Our members are also the best skilled and best trained to do this inherently dangerous work.

The IBEW's interest in the policies governing the poles attached to the energy and telecommunications infrastructure are as practical as it gets, as IBEW members are literally on the front lines of its installation, maintenance and development.

Poles are fundamental to the distribution network, and these days, Local 126 members are setting 100 poles or more per day. For each pole set, we transfer the energized facility to the new pole, rendering the old pole useless for that service, be it power or telecommunications cables or wiring. However, we don't touch other services that may be attached to the old pole, as that is outside the scope of the work we are contracted to perform. These could include traffic signals or

municipal infrastructure or other fiber facilities. No other entity is responsible for consolidating the various attachments, or removing the old poles.

Protecting the health and safety of the line workforce is a founding principle of the IBEW – and a priority that hasn't wavered in more than 130 years. Damaged, abandoned poles that are no longer in active service pose a direct safety threat to utility workers and the public. Although life expectancy of poles varies according to material type and preservatives applied, utility poles typically last 30-40 years. Poles must be periodically replaced due to diminished structural integrity, old age or nearby construction work.

In the state of Pennsylvania, as far as I am aware, there are no metrics that illustrate the scale of this problem. Based on my experience as an outside lineman and that of other IBEW members, I estimate there are tens of thousands of redundant poles, characterized in the draft legislation as “double poles.” Currently in Pennsylvania, there is no law mandating the removal of poles no longer in use that are eyesores at a minimum – or potentially dangerous obstacles at worst.

Left in place, these old poles can fall or collapse, potentially causing harm to individuals or damage to property. Failing responsible, timely removal of damaged or unused poles, state laws need to exist to deter this practice.

It will also be helpful to resolve this issue before the looming buildout of the broadband network under the federal Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, as it will require additional telecommunications hardware installation.

Pennsylvania has received \$1.16 billion through the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Program (BEAD) to help provide access to high-speed internet across the state. This work is scheduled to begin the second half of next year. Additionally, the Commonwealth was allocated nearly \$280 million from the American Rescue Plan Act Capital Projects Fund for broadband deployment. Work

related to that tranche is expected to begin early in 2024. The IBEW welcomes the opportunity for the new jobs this buildout provides.

Please note that as this line work accelerates, the importance of the highly skilled, trained power line professionals of the IBEW to erect and replace poles and transfer primary and secondary power, cable or fiber. I don't think it's hard to imagine the scale of disaster possible with the use of un- or undertrained technicians handling energized lines. This could result in loss of electric or telecommunications service, with property loss and injury or death distinct possibilities.

In closing, the IBEW respectfully requests that the state Legislature act to require the Pennsylvania Utility Commission to commence a rulemaking to provide support for the coordination and compensation for pole attachment relocation and establish procedures for compensation, indemnification and expeditious removal of an abandoned pole attachment. This work should only be accomplished by highly qualified IBEW line workers, due to these tasks' frequent contact with live distribution wires or cables.

Once again, I thank the Subcommittee for its interest in this subject, and will be happy to answer any questions.

Thank you.