WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE

2020 REGULAR SESSION

Introduced

Senate Bill 753

BY SENATORS MAYNARD, TRUMP, RUCKER, PLYMALE,

HARDESTY, PREZIOSO, CLINE, JEFFRIES, STOLLINGS,

IHLLENFELD, AND HAMILTON

[Introduced February 12, 2020; referred
to the Committee on Government Organization]
A BILL to amend and reenact §24-2-1 of the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended; and to
amend said code by adding thereto a new section, designated §24-2-1o, all relating to
authorizing the Public Service Commission to approve plans proposed by electric utilities
to install middle-mile broadband fiber and provide expedited cost recovery.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:

ARTICLE 2. POWER AND DUTIES OF PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION.

§24-2-1. Jurisdiction of Commission; waiver of jurisdiction.

(a) The jurisdiction of the Public Service Commission shall extend to all public utilities in
this state and shall include any utility engaged in any of the following public services:
Common carriage of passengers or goods, whether by air, railroad, street railroad, motor
or otherwise, by express or otherwise, by land, water or air, whether wholly or partly by land, water
or air; transportation of oil, gas or water by pipeline; transportation of coal and its derivatives and
all mixtures and combinations thereof with other substances by pipeline; sleeping car or parlor
car services; transmission of messages by telephone, telegraph or radio, except an electric utility
that has installed middle-mile fiber broadband infrastructure under the provisions of §24-2-1n of
this article shall not be considered a public utility engaged in the transmission of messages by
telephone, telegraph or radio; generation and transmission of electrical energy by hydroelectric
or other utilities for service to the public, whether directly or through a distributing utility; supplying
water, gas or electricity by municipalities or others; sewer systems servicing 25 or more persons
or firms other than the owner of the sewer systems: Provided. That if a public utility other than a
political subdivision intends to provide sewer service by an innovative, alternative method, as
defined by the federal Environmental Protection Agency, the innovative, alternative method is a
public utility function and subject to the jurisdiction of the Public Service Commission regardless
of the number of customers served by the innovative, alternative method; any public service
district created under the provisions of §16-13A-1, et seq. of this code, except that the Public
Service Commission will have no jurisdiction over the provision of stormwater services by a public
service district; toll bridges, wharves, ferries; solid waste facilities; and any other public service:  

Provided, however, That natural gas producers who provide natural gas service to not more than 25 residential customers are exempt from the jurisdiction of the commission with regard to the provisions of such residential service: Provided further, That upon request of any of the customers of such natural gas producers, the commission may, upon good cause being shown, exercise such authority as the commission may deem appropriate over the operation, rates and charges of such producer and for such length of time as the commission may consider to be proper.

(b) The jurisdiction of the commission over political subdivisions of this state providing separate or combined water and/or sewer services and having at least 4,500 customers and annual combined gross revenues of $3 million or more that are political subdivisions of the state is limited to:

(1) General supervision of public utilities, as granted and described in §24-2-5 of this code;

(2) Regulation of measurements, practices, acts or services, as granted and described in §24-2-7 of this code;

(3) Regulation of a system of accounts to be kept by a public utility that is a political subdivision of the state, as granted and described in §24-2-8 of this code;

(4) Submission of information to the commission regarding rates, tolls, charges or practices, as granted and described in §24-2-9 of this code;

(5) Authority to subpoena witnesses, take testimony and administer oaths to any witness in any proceeding before or conducted by the commission, as granted and described in §24-2-10 of this code; and

(6) Investigation and resolution of disputes between a political subdivision of the state providing wholesale water and/or wastewater treatment or other services, whether by contract or through a tariff, and its customer or customers, including, but not limited to, rates, fees and charges, service areas and contested utility combinations: Provided, That any request for an investigation related to such a dispute that is based on the act or omission of the political
subdivision shall be filed within 30 days of the act or omission of the political subdivision and the commission shall resolve said dispute within 120 days of filing. The 120-day period for resolution of the dispute may be tolled by the commission until the necessary information showing the basis of the rates, fees, and charges or other information as the commission considers necessary is filed: Provided, however, That the disputed rates, fees and charges so fixed by the political subdivision providing separate or combined water and/or sewer services shall remain in full force and effect until set aside, altered, or amended by the commission in an order to be followed in the future.

(7) Customers of water and sewer utilities operated by a political subdivision of the state may bring formal or informal complaints regarding the commission’s exercise of the powers enumerated in this section and the commission shall resolve these complaints.

(8) In the event that a political subdivision has a deficiency in either its bond revenue or bond reserve accounts, or is otherwise in breach of a bond covenant, any bond holder may petition the Public Service Commission for such redress as will bring the accounts to current status or otherwise resolve the breached covenant, and the commission shall have jurisdiction to fully resolve the alleged deficiency or breach.

(c) The commission may, upon application, waive its jurisdiction and allow a utility operating in an adjoining state to provide service in West Virginia when:

(1) An area of West Virginia cannot be practically and economically served by a utility licensed to operate within the State of West Virginia;

(2) Said area can be provided with utility service by a utility which operates in a state adjoining West Virginia;

(3) The utility operating in the adjoining state is regulated by a regulatory agency or commission of the adjoining state; and

(4) The number of customers to be served is not substantial. The rates the out-of-state utility charges West Virginia customers shall be the same as the rate the utility is duly authorized
to charge in the adjoining jurisdiction. The commission, in the case of any such utility, may revoke
its waiver of jurisdiction for good cause.

(d) Any other provisions of this chapter to the contrary notwithstanding:

(1) An owner or operator of an electric generating facility located or to be located in this
state that has been designated as an exempt wholesale generator under applicable federal law,
or will be so designated prior to commercial operation of the facility, and for which such facility
the owner or operator holds a certificate of public convenience and necessity issued by the
commission on or before July 1, 2003, shall be subject to §24-2-11c(e) through §24-2-11c(j) of
this code as if the certificate of public convenience and necessity for such facility were a siting
certificate issued under §24-2-11c of this code and shall not otherwise be subject to the jurisdiction
of the commission or to the provisions of this chapter with respect to such facility except for the
making or constructing of a material modification thereof as provided in §24-2-1(d)(5) of this code.

(2) Any person, corporation or other entity that intends to construct or construct and
operate an electric generating facility to be located in this state that has been designated as an
exempt wholesale generator under applicable federal law, or will be so designated prior to
commercial operation of the facility, and for which facility the owner or operator does not hold a
certificate of public convenience and necessity issued by the commission on or before July 1,
2003, shall, prior to commencement of construction of the facility, obtain a siting certificate from
the commission pursuant to the provisions of §24-2-11c of this code in lieu of a certificate of public
convenience and necessity pursuant to the provisions of §24-2-11 of this code. An owner or
operator of an electric generating facility as is described in this subdivision for which a siting
certificate has been issued by the commission shall be subject to §24-2-11c(e) through §24-2-
11c(j) of this code and shall not otherwise be subject to the jurisdiction of the commission or to
the provisions of this chapter with respect to such facility except for the making or constructing of
a material modification thereof as provided in §24-2-1(d)(5) of this code.

(3) An owner or operator of an electric generating facility located in this state that had not
been designated as an exempt wholesale generator under applicable federal law prior to commercial operation of the facility that generates electric energy solely for sale at retail outside this state, or solely for sale at wholesale in accordance with any applicable federal law that preempts state law, or solely for both such sales at retail and such sales at wholesale, and that had been constructed and had engaged in commercial operation on or before July 1, 2003, shall not be subject to the jurisdiction of the commission or to the provisions of this chapter with respect to such facility, regardless of whether such facility subsequent to its construction has been or will be designated as an exempt wholesale generator under applicable federal law: Provided, That such owner or operator shall be subject to §24-2-1(d)(5) of this code if a material modification of such facility is made or constructed.

(4) Any person, corporation or other entity that intends to construct or construct and operate an electric generating facility to be located in this state that has not been or will not be designated as an exempt wholesale generator under applicable federal law prior to commercial operation of the facility that will generate electric energy solely for sale at retail outside this state, or solely for sale at wholesale in accordance with any applicable federal law that preempts state law, or solely for both such sales at retail and such sales at wholesale and that had not been constructed and had not been engaged in commercial operation on or before July 1, 2003, shall, prior to commencement of construction of the facility, obtain a siting certificate from the commission pursuant to the provisions of §24-2-11c of this code in lieu of a certificate of public convenience and necessity pursuant to the provisions of §24-2-11 of this code. An owner or operator of an electric generating facility as is described in this subdivision for which a siting certificate has been issued by the commission shall be subject to §24-2-11c(e) through §24-2-11c(j) of this code and shall not otherwise be subject to the jurisdiction of the commission or to the provisions of this chapter with respect to such facility except for the making or constructing of a material modification thereof as provided in §24-2-1(d)(5) of this code.

(5) An owner or operator of an electric generating facility described in this subsection shall,
before making or constructing a material modification of the facility that is not within the terms of
any certificate of public convenience and necessity or siting certificate previously issued for the
facility or an earlier material modification thereof, obtain a siting certificate for the modification
from the commission pursuant to the provisions of §24-2-11c of this code in lieu of a certificate of
public convenience and necessity for the modification pursuant to the provisions of §24-2-11 of
this code and, except for the provisions of §24-2-11c of this code, shall not otherwise be subject
to the jurisdiction of the commission or to the provisions of this chapter with respect to such
modification.

(6) The commission shall consider an application for a certificate of public convenience
and necessity filed pursuant to §24-2-11 of this code to construct an electric generating facility
described in this subsection or to make or construct a material modification of such electric
generating facility as an application for a siting certificate pursuant to §24-2-11c of this code if the
application for the certificate of public convenience and necessity was filed with the commission
prior to July 1, 2003, and if the commission has not issued a final order thereon as of that date.

(7) The limitations on the jurisdiction of the commission over, and on the applicability of
the provisions of this chapter to, the owner or operator of an electric generating facility as imposed
by and described in this subsection shall not be deemed to affect or limit the commission’s
jurisdiction over contracts or arrangements between the owner or operator of such facility and any
affiliated public utility subject to the provisions of this chapter.

(e) The commission shall not have jurisdiction of Internet protocol-enabled service or
voice-over Internet protocol-enabled service. As used in this subsection:

(1) “Internet protocol-enabled service” means any service, capability, functionality or
application provided using Internet protocol, or any successor protocol, that enables an end user
to send or receive a communication in Internet protocol format, or any successor format,
regardless of whether the communication is voice, data or video.

(2) “Voice-over Internet protocol service” means any service that:
(i) Enables real-time two-way voice communications that originate or terminate from the user’s location using Internet protocol or a successor protocol; and

(ii) Uses a broadband connection from the user’s location.

(3) The term “voice-over Internet protocol service” includes any service that permits users to receive calls that originate on the public-switched telephone network and to terminate calls on the public-switched telephone network.

(f) Notwithstanding any other provisions of this article, the commission shall not have jurisdiction to review or approve any transaction involving a telephone company otherwise subject to §24-2-12 and §24-2-12a of this code if all entities involved in the transaction are under common ownership.

(g) The Legislature finds that the rates, fees, charges and ratemaking of municipal power systems are most fairly and effectively regulated by the local governing body. Therefore, notwithstanding any other provisions of this article, the commission shall not have jurisdiction over the setting or adjustment of rates, fees and charges of municipal power systems. Further, the jurisdiction of the Public Service Commission over municipal power systems is limited to that granted specifically in this code.

§24-2-10. Middle-mile fiber Broadband Infrastructure Expansion Program.

(a) Legislative findings. The Legislature finds:

(1) That access to broadband services is of critical importance to and a necessary prerequisite for enabling economic development in the state and for improving education, health care, public safety and government services, among other benefits to its citizens;

(2) That broadband expansion into unserved and underserved rural areas of the state continues to be an issue of importance to the Legislature, and progress is hindered by lack of full development of middle-mile broadband fiber infrastructure within the state;

(3) That the issues which have hindered the provision of broadband access to rural areas of the state especially disadvantage the elderly and low-income households;
(4) That it continues to be a primary goal of the Legislature to make every municipality, community and rural area in this state accessible to Internet communications through the expansion, extension and general availability of broadband services and technology;

(5) That regulated electric utilities have existing distribution infrastructure in place throughout the state, and that their existing infrastructure could be utilized in connection with construction of middle-mile broadband fiber assets;

(6) That it is in the public interest to expedite construction of middle-mile broadband fiber infrastructure to provide the necessary architecture to facilitate additional broadband Internet access to individuals and institutions in unserved and underserved areas of the state; and

(7) That it is appropriate to establish a program to allow electric utilities to construct middle-mile fiber broadband assets within the power supply zone utilizing existing and new electric utility distribution assets in a manner that addresses the needs of the public and is consistent with the operational concerns of the electric utilities that may participate in this program.

(b) Definitions. For purposes of this section:

“Commission” means the Public Service Commission of West Virginia.

“Council” means the Broadband Enhancement Council, as defined in §31G-1-1, et seq. of this code.

“Electric utility” means any electric utility operating within this state that is regulated by the commission.

“Program” means the Middle-mile fiber Broadband Expansion Program established pursuant to subsection (c) of this section.

“Project” means one or more middle-mile fiber infrastructure expansion projects, including any portion of such projects to be used for the electric utility’s communication needs, proposed by an electric utility and approved by the commission pursuant to subsection (e) of this section as part of the program.

(c) Establishment of program. Commencing July 1, 2020, the Middle-mile fiber Broadband
Infrastructure Expansion Program is hereby authorized and established.

(d) Authorizing participation. An electric utility having distribution infrastructure in this state may participate in the program pursuant to the provisions of this section.

(e) Powers and duties of Public Service Commission to act on written plans and amendments to written plans. The commission shall have the following powers and duties in connection with the program:

(1) Review, approve or reject each written plan submitted by an electric utility pursuant to subsection (f) of this section. A written plan shall be approved if the commission determines that the proposed plan is reasonable, prudent, useful, and is not contrary to the public interests, considering the interests of the potential broadband users and the electric utility customers.

(2) Review, approve or reject amendments to written plans submitted by an electric utility pursuant to subsection (f) of this section. Amendments to a written plan shall be approved if the commission determines that the proposed amendments to a written plan are reasonable, prudent, useful and not contrary to the public interest considering the interests of the potential broadband users and the electric utility customers.

(3) Perform any other duties necessary to effectuate the provisions of this section.

(f) Written plan. Following the council’s determination that construction and operation of a middle-mile broadband infrastructure expansion project by an electric utility is feasible pursuant to §31G-4-5 of this code, the electric utility shall file a written plan and application seeking the commission’s approval of the project and its associated cost recovery. The written plan and application is in lieu of a proceeding pursuant to §24-2-11 of this code and shall contain the following:

(1) The route of the middle-mile fiber infrastructure proposed for the project, the number of fiber strands that would be utilized in connection with the proposed project and dedicated to serve as the middle-mile, the location of the electric utility’s distribution infrastructure that will be utilized in connection with the proposed project, the capacity of the middle-mile that will be
available to lease to last-mile broadband Internet providers and other third parties upon completion of the proposed project, and the commitment of at least one last-mile broadband Internet provider that will lease access to the middle-mile fiber assets constructed as part of the proposed project, and an estimate of potential broadband customers that would be served by the middle-mile infrastructure:

(2) The estimated cost of the proposed project, including, but not limited to, engineering costs, construction costs, permitting costs, right of way costs and a reasonable allowance for funds used during construction;

(3) Proposed schedule of construction of the proposed project; and

(4) Method of attachment and connection of the middle-mile broadband fiber assets to the electric utility’s distribution infrastructure.

(5) Testimony, exhibits or other evidence that demonstrates the project is reasonable, prudent, useful and not contrary to the public interest.

(6) A cost recovery mechanism consistent with this section; and

(7) Other information the applicant considers relevant or the commission requires.

(g) The electric utility shall publish, in the form the commission directs, which form shall include, but not be limited to, the anticipated monthly and yearly electric rate increase, if any, and actual rates under the proposal, by average percentage and dollar amount for customers within a class of service, as a Class I legal advertisement in compliance with the provisions of §59-3-1 et seq. of this code, the publication area to be each county in which service is provided by the electric utility, a notice of the filing of the application and that the commission shall hold a hearing on the application within 90 days of the notice; unless no opposition to the rate change is received by the commission within the time limits established by the commission, in which case the hearing can be waived, and the commission shall issue a final order within 150 days of the application filing date.

(h) Upon notice and hearing, if required by the commission, the commission shall approve
the plan and allow expedited recovery of costs related to the expenditures as provided in subsection (f) of this section if the commission finds that the expenditures and the associated rate requirements are just, reasonable, not contrary to the public interest, and will allow for the provision and maintenance of adequate, efficient, safe, reliable and reasonably priced middle-mile fiber broadband service.

(i) Upon commission approval, an electric utility will be authorized to implement the plan and to recover related project costs, net of any middle-mile broadband revenues or contributions in aid of construction as provided in the following:

(1) An allowance for return shall be calculated by applying a rate of return to the planned net incremental increase to rate base attributable to the project for the coming year, considering the projected amount and timing of expenditures under the project, plus any expenditures in previous years of the project. The rate of return shall be determined by utilizing the rate of return on equity authorized by the commission in the electric utility’s most recent rate case proceeding or in the case of a settled rate case, a rate of return on equity as determined by the commission, and the projected cost of the electric utility’s debt during the period of the project to determine the weighted cost of capital based upon the electric utility’s capital structure.

(2) Income taxes applicable to the return allowed on the project shall be calculated for inclusion in rates at the federal and state statutory rates.

(3) Depreciation and property tax expenses directly attributable to the project shall be estimated for the upcoming year.

(4) Operation and maintenance expense specifically and directly related to operation and maintenance of the middle-mile fiber broadband facilities.

(5) Following commission approval of the project and related cost recovery mechanism, an electric utility shall place into effect a commission approved rate surcharge that recovers the revenue requirement of the allowance for return, related income taxes, operation and maintenance expenses, depreciation, property tax expenses associated with the electric utility’s
estimated project investments for the upcoming year, net of middle-mile revenue or contributions in aid of construction recovery of those costs provided by last mile broadband Internet providers upon completion of the project, if any (“middle-mile cost recovery rates”). In each year subsequent to the order approving the project and middle-mile cost recovery rates, the electric utility shall file a petition with the commission setting forth new proposed middle-mile cost recovery rates that recover the revenue requirement of the projected costs of the project based on investments to be made in the subsequent year, plus any under-recovery or minus any over-recovery of actual costs attributable to the project, for the preceding year.

(j) The electric utility may make any accounting accruals necessary to establish a regulatory asset or liability through which actual costs incurred and costs recovered through the rate mechanism are tracked.

(k) Construction, installation, operation, maintenance and repair of middle-mile fiber expansion projects. Subject to continuing authority of the commission to determine the reasonableness of acts and practices, for all projects contained in a written plan approved by the commission pursuant to subsection (e) of this section, and constructed, installed, operated, maintained and repaired by an electric utility pursuant to this section, the electric utility shall have control of the scope, scheduling and execution of the project to construct, install, operate, maintain and repair middle-mile fiber assets, including fiber build route selection and build and splice schedules. The electric utility shall be entitled to reestablish electric service and assure safety of its workers prior to restoration of middle-mile fiber broadband service in order to ensure operational safety matters of the shared infrastructure. Additionally, the electric utility shall be entitled to use contractors chosen and approved by the electric utility to construct, install, operate, maintain and repair middle-mile fiber assets pursuant to this section because of its or electric utility’s knowledge of hazards in the power supply zone and the associated controls to reduce the risks involved. Nothing in this section confers any rights to work in the power supply space except by the electric utility and its designated contractors.
(l) **Attachment and connection of middle-mile fiber assets.** An electric utility participating in the program shall have sole control of the location and method of attachment and connection of middle-mile fiber assets to the electric utility's distribution infrastructure, unless otherwise ordered by the commission.

(m) **Management of fiber projects.** In order to manage operations, an electric utility participating in the program shall manage and document the entities that lease middle-mile fiber assets for last-mile operations, including, but not limited to, outage notification and management.

(n) **Miscellaneous.** Notwithstanding anything in this code or in the articles of incorporation of an electric utility to the contrary, an electric utility may, either directly or indirectly or through an affiliate or subsidiary, pursuant to a written plan approved by the commission:

1. **Own, manage or control any broadband capacity, equipment and electronics, including any plant, works, system, lines, facilities or properties, or any part or parts thereof, together with all appurtenances thereto, used or useful in connection with the provisions and extension of such broadband services:**

2. **Lease such broadband capacity, equipment or electronics to Internet service providers and other third parties, on a nonexclusive basis; and**

3. **Provide access points that are outside the electric utility’s power supply zone to allow connection between the electric utility’s broadband capacity system and any Internet service provider’s or other third party’s system.**

NOTE: The purpose of this bill is to authorize the Public Service Commission to approve plans proposed by electric utilities to install middle-mile broadband fiber and provide expedited cost recovery.

Strike-throughs indicate language that would be stricken from a heading or the present law, and underscoring indicates new language that would be added.