



The Energy and Technology Committee
Public Hearing, March 9, 2021
Office of Consumer Counsel
Richard E. Sobolewski, Acting Consumer Counsel
Testimony of Richard E. Sobolewski

S.B. No. 990
An Act Preventing New Data Caps During Covid-19

As Acting Consumer Counsel and head of the Office of Consumer Counsel (OCC), which includes the Office of State Broadband, I have reviewed Senate Bill No. 990, *An Act Preventing New Data Caps During Covid-19*. OCC **supports** the Bill.

As drafted, the bill would prohibit any Broadband Internet access service provider from imposing a new data cap—and potential corresponding additional fees—during the duration of the public health emergency declared by Governor Lamont in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Such a prohibition would prevent a plan similar to that which Comcast recently proposed—and later withdrew under significant pressure from the public and government officials—whereby Comcast would have imposed additional fees on those consumers who surpassed a certain amount of data usage. Had Comcast’s plan been implemented, it would have imposed significant financial hardship on consumers already facing tightened circumstances due to the pandemic.

It is undeniable that residential Internet usage has greatly increased in the last year. That increased usage, however, is not attributable to wanton use of the Internet by consumers but to the exigencies necessitated by Covid-19 precautions. Students are now learning on online modules. Office workers are conducting business out of their homes over video and teleconferencing platforms. Public participation in government, community groups, and faith traditions has migrated from in-person to online gatherings. Simply put, it is unfair and unjust to impose higher fees for increased Internet usage on

consumers when they have no choice but to use the Internet to continue their education, profession, and personal lives.

As such, the current bill would insulate consumers from the risk of such a data cap being imposed while the Governor's Covid-19 public health emergency endures. OCC fully supports the bill's goal in this regard. If anything, OCC submits that the bill should go further, to prevent the imposition of any such data caps or fees during any future public health emergency that may occur in Connecticut.

OCC encourages the Committee to pass S.B. 990.