



BOROUGH OF DUNELLEN

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Statement from Mayor Jason F. Cilento Provided at the March 16th NJ Board of Public Utilities Regarding the Public Hearings on Optimum (Altice USA)

Good morning. My name is Jason Cilento, and I am the mayor of the Borough of Dunellen in Middlesex County. I thank Commissioner Mary-Anna Holden for providing me this opportunity to address the Commission this morning. I would also like to thank Director Lawanda Gilbert and the State of New Jersey Board of Public Utilities President and Commissioners for hearing the public's concerns in the matter of the operations of Altice USA in New Jersey, Docket No. CX21010010. I would also like to thank Marilyn Davis and Mike Alexander from Altice for being here today to hear the public's concerns.

As mayor, one of my prime responsibilities is to be an advocate and voice for my constituents – the residents and business owners of Dunellen, and also school children, adults' working-from-home, college students and everyone else who relies on the Internet for their education and livelihoods.

I am here today because the people of Dunellen want, and expect, adequate band width, a reliable connection, and affordable Internet service from their provider. They are not receiving this from Optimum (Altice USA). The COVID-19 pandemic has completely unmasked the shortcomings of Optimum's infrastructure. While I appreciate Optimum Altice's recent efforts in splitting nodes to increase capacity, it should not have taken overtures from myself and other mayors to increase this capacity months already into the pandemic. Even with these node splits, we still experience Internet disruptions in our community. Nonetheless, the lack of competition, constant service disruptions and high prices Dunellen users face with Optimum spurred me to join the mayors of Piscataway Township, Robbinsville Township, Green Brook Township and Hamilton Township last September in a strongly worded letter to the NJ Board of Public Utilities that detailed our grievances.

In 2018, at Altice's request, we conducted a survey of all Dunellen users prior to the renewal of the franchise agreement with them. We received 252 responses: 74% of respondents were dissatisfied with Altice's service; 74% stated they use Optimum only because there is no alternative cable TV or internet provider; and 86% considered Optimum's offerings overpriced. Even after all that work and negotiations, we are still waiting for the renewal franchise for this agreement to be approved by Altice USA.

Unfortunately, prices have risen sharply over recent years and intermittent but persistent outages wreak havoc on our daily lives. Last Monday, Borough Hall lost its Internet for 4 hours. The business of government shut down. Our residents call to complain to me, members of the

governing body, and the administrative offices multiple times a week about similar disruptions in their Internet and price increases. They also ask, “Why is Optimum the only game in town?”

As you know, Optimum has a near monopoly on Internet and cable television in Dunellen and many other municipalities like ours. One would hope that competition among different carriers would lower prices and improve service, both technological service and customer service. Dunellen has frequently called upon other providers to franchise within the Borough; sadly, with no success. Many throughout the State of New Jersey are under the impression that municipalities decide which service providers in these fields will service their constituency. You and I both know this isn't true. These service providers are private companies and draw their own lines within their designated boundaries.

Our world is increasingly dependent upon high speed Internet and the time has come to assist smaller municipalities like Dunellen in helping provide competition amongst providers so companies like Altice do not have a monopoly in our communities. We must break these regional boundaries and allow for improved accessibility and competition among service providers. This type of competition will truly allow for companies like Altice USA to improve their services.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.