



February 6, 2026

Mr. Marc Morin
Secretary General
Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission
Gatineau, Quebec
K1A 0N2

Dear Mr. Morin,

Broadband and cellular connectivity is vital to a community's economic prosperity and quality of life. Yet rural, remote, and northern communities face disproportionately high gaps in services.

As of December 2024, only 84% of rural Ontario households have access to high-speed internet compared to 96% across all Ontario households¹. The Ontario government has now delayed the goal of delivering broadband to all Ontario residents until 2028, which further extends gaps in coverage. Cellular connectivity in northern and rural areas also lags. As is being currently consulted on by the CRTC, official coverage statistics often overstate the unreliable and inconsistent connections experienced by rural residents.

Where digital connectivity isn't available, landline service is the only reliable form of telecommunication, particularly during power outages or severe weather events. Bell is applying for forbearance from the regulation of residential local exchange services in Ontario. ROMA has significant concerns that forbearance could result in the withdrawal of landline phone services in rural areas where alternative internet or cellular service providers is limited. Both in the number of providers and service area coverage.

Disconnecting rural Ontario communities poses significant long-term risks. The withdraw of essential telecommunication services reduces access to government and emergency services, with downstream impacts on public safety. Withdrawal also creates commerce impacts, by making it harder for residents and businesses to engage in trade, and deters new business formation. Northern, remote and rural communities cover vast land mass and huge distances separate settlement areas. Because cellular coverage in these regions

¹ Rural Ontario Institute, [Rural Wellbeing Internet Factsheet](#) (2025).

of Ontario is limited, residents rely on landlines to maintain social connections with friends and family beyond their community, and to support independence and aging in place.

The delay to province-wide broadband internet access until 2028 and remaining gaps in reliable cellular service where people live, work and travel, underlines the fundamental importance of landline services in rural communities. ROMA calls on the CRTC to consider evidence from affected rural municipalities before approving forbearance requests. Any decision needs to include rigorous analysis of the local impact of deregulation and on the availability of reliable alternative communications services.

Sincerely,



Christa Lowry
ROMA Chair
Mayor of Mississippi Mills

CC

Jeanne Pratt, Acting Commissioner of Competition, Competition Bureau
Mayor Dave Plourde, Chair, Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities
Mayor Rick Dumas, Chair, Northwestern Ontario Municipalities Association