



On behalf of the 70,000 skilled construction workers represented by the unions affiliated with the Minnesota Building and Construction Trades Council, I am writing to share our strong opposition to weakening safety standards and accountability for broadband installation. House File 47 undermines the Broadband Worker Safety legislation passed by the Legislature in 2024 that establishes minimum qualifications for safety-sensitive positions and supports the development of skilled local workforce.

Unions affiliated with the Minnesota Building Trades represent men and women who build every part of Minnesota's transportation, water and energy infrastructure — from highways and bridges to underground electric and gas distribution lines. Our members use skills learned on the job and through best-in-class training and apprenticeship programs to build infrastructure that is safe and reliable. In return, our contractor partners pay family-supporting wages and benefits necessary for our members to pursue construction as a career, not just a job.

Minnesota Building Trades and our contractor partners are all too aware of the growing crisis in broadband installation. After all, it is union tradesmen and tradeswomen who build the underground gas, electric and other municipal infrastructure that is vulnerable to unsafe broadband installation practices, and who must repair the infrastructure after it has been damaged.

Minnesota maintains high standards in every other area of infrastructure construction — both for the quality of the work and the quality of the resulting jobs. Minnesota's public infrastructure is built with prevailing wage protections that provide a level playing field and encourage contractors to invest in a skilled workforce rather than participate in a race-to-the-bottom. Meanwhile, Minnesota's private energy infrastructure is closely regulated, and both investor- owned and cooperative utilities have similar incentives to invest in high-quality workforce and work.

Unfortunately, the cable and broadband industry is the exception. Broadband providers resist being held to basic standards that apply to other types of critical infrastructure. While contractors who install gas and water lines are required to meet minimum workforce qualifications, an industry whose contractors operate drills around — and sometimes straight through those lines — rejects proposed minimum qualifications designed to prevent a catastrophic incident.

There is no reason we should not keep our increasingly vital broadband infrastructure on a similar path by maintaining minimum training standards, holding broadband providers accountable for their contracting practices, and incentivizing best practices.

It is time for Minnesota to treat broadband as critical infrastructure, not only by investing in deployment of fiber to every home and business in the state, but also by holding the industry accountable to the same standards as other infrastructure operators and recipients of public funds. We urge you to oppose House File 47 which will make Minnesota workers and communities less safe and risk public and utility infrastructure.

Thank you,

Tom Dicklich, Executive Director



Minnesota Utility Contractors Association

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February 18, 2025

Hon. Rep. Dave Baker, Chair,
House Workforce, Labor, and Economic Development Committee
Author: Rep. Issac Schultz

VIA EMAIL

RE: HF 47 Certification of Underground Telecommunications Installers

Chair Baker, Rep. Schultz, and Committee,

The Minnesota Utility Contractors Association (MUCA) represents over 140 companies across the state that perform utility installation services. Everything from sewer, water, storm water, gas, electric, cable, telecom, and fiber optic installations.

While MUCA supports training efforts for industry, and we support and agree with the revisions noted by striking Subd. 2. (3), (b), and the reduction in hours required from 40 down to 10, we still have strong concerns for provisions contained in the new statute. Many of the training components outlined in the legislation already exist and are currently being satisfied through other industry certification programs.

There are several programs, nationally and locally, that already certify contractors for compliance with utility installation outlined in this legislation (Subd. 3, (1), i., ii., iii., iv., v., vi., etc.). We are not aware of any study, or comprehensive job task analysis performed to identify the specifics that direct or differentiate this training from what already exists.

One example is Operator Qualification (49CFR, Part 192) from the Pipeline Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA). This is a national regulation for gas installation and already covers many of the topics this bill seeks to address. MUCA's Pipelayer Certification that is required by MN Department of Labor covers many of the same topics suggested in this bill. And finally, there are also national utility locator certification programs already covering several items mentioned.

We see this effort as duplicative and placing an additional unnecessary burden on the utility construction industry that is already trained to install utilities of all kinds. We believe there is not a need for a separate, additional certification that will increase the project cost for municipalities and increase the burden for Minnesota taxpayers.

MUCA offers our experience and expertise as a resource to answer any questions or discuss any concerns regarding underground utilities and the utility construction industry.

Thank you for your consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephanie Menning". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Stephanie Menning, CAE, IOM
Executive Director, MUCA

OUR MISSION

To promote the underground utility industry by providing safety training, continuing education, scholarships and legislative relations.

OUR VALUES

Honest Communications
Transparent Leadership
Authentic Engagement

To: Workforce, Labor, and Economic Development Finance and Policy committee staff
Re: Telcom Installation Contractors Experience

I have been Engineering Supervisor here at Austin Utilities for over 24 years. I have been responsible for Damage Prevention here, including electric, water and natural gas utilities. Mapping and marking our underground utilities.

Austin Utilities has had horrible experiences with telcom installation contractors over the years. Most of the telcoms that operate in Austin hire the cheapest contractor they can possibly get. Which often means inexperienced and untrained. That often means they operate in an unsafe manner, hitting our facilities, including gas, far more often than should happen. Failure to safely hand expose utilities they cross before machine excavating close to that facility is the most frequent violation.

In 2023-2023-2024, Metronet overbuilt Austin with their fiber. They brought in inexperienced, untrained contractors, that were the cheapest available. The damages to our gas system shot up terribly due to all their work. Many hazardous gas leaks were created by their damages. The City of Austin, in charge of local city ROW, shut down all Metronet contractor activity from Sept. 2023-Nov. 2023, until Metronet could come up with a plan how their contractors could continue work on their overbuild safely.

I have been President of the Prairieland Utility Coordinating Committee (PUCC) for most of the past 20 years. PUCC is one of 6 UCC's throughout MN planning and conducting Damage Prevention Meetings with excavator each spring. Many of the discussions our committee has, revolve around what we can do to work with telcom contractors to get them to operate safer. We work in conjunction with Gopher State One-Call and the Office of Pipeline Safety.

I was very happy to hear of the changes made to 216B during 2024 that require a 40 hour safety course for all telcom installation contractors. Something sorely needed for years.

Sincerely,



Keven Maxa
PUC President
Engineering Supervisor, Austin Utilities
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