



Public Space Committee  
D.C. Dept. of Transportation  
55 M Street, SE, Suite 400  
Washington, D.C. 20003  
VIA EMAIL: [publicspace.committee@dc.gov](mailto:publicspace.committee@dc.gov)

March 15, 2019

Dear Members of the Public Space Committee:

I am the Executive Director of the LGBT Technology Partnership (“LGBT Tech”), an organization that brings together cutting edge tech companies, nonprofit organizations, policy makers, scholars and innovators to improve access, increase inclusion, ensure safety and empower entrepreneurship for LGBT communities around technology. LGBT Tech encourages the continued early adoption and use of cutting-edge, new and emerging technologies by providing information, education and strategic outreach for LGBT communities. We are a national, nonpartisan group of LGBT organizations, academics and high technology companies whose mission is to engage with critical technology and public policy leaders for strategic discussions at all levels. LGBT Tech empowers LGBT communities and individuals, and ensures that media, telecommunications and high technology issues of specific concern to LGBT communities are addressed in public policy conversations.

Although the organization I run is national, the Washington, D.C. area is particularly important to me personally and professionally, especially when it comes to the connectivity for the LGBTQ community. I graduated high school and went to college in the suburbs of D.C. D.C. is also where I came out as gay and consequently was kicked out of my family home rendering me homeless. I’ve built my career in D.C. including positions with the Washington Blade, Discovery Communications and serving as a board member of the LGBTQ youth organization SMYAL.

As the Executive Director of LGBT Tech, I have spoken about the importance of launching newer technologies to close the digital divide and specifically how 5G has the potential to transform technological access to unserved and underserved communities such as the LGBTQ community by helping to close the digital divide and allow individuals to access basic yet essential services that can make a tremendous impact. No longer does an LGBT individual, regardless of culture or background, need to grow up in a world where they feel alone. That is significant since minority communities like the LGBTQ community cannot afford to fall behind in the technology race when adequate access to reliable fast technology can impact everything from healthcare, education, economic opportunities or finding a safe community online and could make a huge difference between success and failure in everyday life. Technology, through smartphones and wireless broadband networks, connects and empowers the LGBTQ community regardless of their geographic location.

We must continue this advocacy, especially as it relates to closing the digital divide and making technology more accessible for all. This is where I know the development and deployment of 5G wireless networks plays a pivotal role. Unlike previous wireless networks, 5G requires a specific type of hardware to work properly, commonly known as small cells. This network of low-powered antennas called nodes make it possible for large amounts of data to travel at high speeds and are installed in public right-of-ways, such as on street lights. For these reasons, I have stressed the importance to bring 5G technology to the masses as quickly as possible.

While the tech community is buzzing with the potential new platforms, intersections, and ventures that 5G could bring, it is important we not lose sight of the simple, yet life-changing, impact it could have and one I've personally seen as a board member of SMYAL. Something as simple as easing the burden of a doctor's visit, for example. As a minority group, the LGBTQ community can face uphill battles when looking for a doctor—18 percent of LGBTQ Americans avoid going to the doctor because they fear discrimination. Naturally, many turn to their phones for the answer, with 81 percent of LGBTQ youth searching for medical related information online compared to only 46 percent of non-LGBTQ youth. We confirmed these statistics during the launch of our PowerOn Program in Washington, D.C. when several youth who received a phone from the program started to use the services at Whitman-Walker Clinic and were able to continue services because of their access to the Internet via their smartphone. With those statistics and personal stories, imagine the life-changing benefits that could be experienced if those in need could connect with a medical professional through their phone. 5G presents a stronger, more reliable network that will give more Americans and D.C. residents access to telehealth services. This means more choice in who to see for treatment, access to a wider variety of specialists, and a greater market for care.

Bridging the digital divide requires a multi-pronged approach and I urge the District to continue its work removing barriers to deployment that will ensure that these much needed new technologies reach those that need it the most as quickly as possible. 5G has enormous potential to be a powerful tool to eradicate the digital divide as it has the potential to provide faster communications and increase response times for underserved and unserved communities. For these reasons, I urge the Public Space Committee to prioritize the development of 5G and remove the barriers.

Sincerely,



Christopher Wood  
Executive Director  
LGBT Tech