



**To: Senate Committee on Transport and Communications**

**The Senate of Canada**

**Ottawa, Ontario**

**Canada, K1A 0A4**

**December 19, 2024**

**Re: Committee Study on Copper Wire Theft in the Telecommunications Industry**

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Dear TRCM Committee Members,

Telecommunications infrastructure is a pillar for the Canadian economy. It powers hospitals and emergency rooms, financial service systems, government systems, and cybersecurity infrastructure — all are dependent on strong, secure and connected networks. Increasing rates of copper theft and network tampering in recent years are impacting this connectivity and threatening public safety nationwide. Higher rates of organized crime, as well as repeat offenders, are a serious threat to Canadians' connection to essential and emergency services.

Every service interruption caused by vandalism and copper theft affects Canadians' day-to-day lives and business operations. These incidents have far-reaching consequences and affect both the telecommunications industry and every part of the country. For example, on the Rogers network:

- In May 2024 alone, network vandalism impacted ten federal constituencies from coast to coast. This included outages in Alberta, Ontario and New Brunswick that impacted approximately 35,000 Canadians on our network across broadband, wireless, wireline, and digital services. This included a single incident of vandalism that impacted approximately 15,000 broadband customers in Alberta.
- On average, outages due to vandalism can take ~3-4x longer to repair, with costs as high as \$1M per attack.

Often, these outages are caused by thieves stealing copper wire, piping and other network materials to sell parts on the black market. While copper is often the target, these incidents regularly damage other parts of the network including fibre optic cable and create a serious threat to essential services in local communities.

With crime on the rise, we have experienced an over 400% increase in vandalism-related outages since 2022 and twice as many total outage hours per year due to these incidents.

Unfortunately, without a specific charge under the Criminal Code, these crimes often result in minor charges such as theft under \$5,000. This results in poor enforcement of penalties and insufficient deterrence, meaning repeat offenders only risk being given the minimum penalty.

### **Recommendation**

Given the significant impact of these incidents on public health and safety, government action is clearly needed. We are calling on the government to:

- Create a new Criminal Code offence for “mischief – essential infrastructure” to specifically target damage to critical telecommunications infrastructure, a similar specific provision to the one introduced with C-70’s “sabotage - essential infrastructure.”

This would strengthen enforcement and deterrence, helping to dissuade individuals from engaging in such acts. Most importantly, it would help protect Canadians from these disruptive crimes by giving law enforcement the provisions they need for the punishment to match the crime.

Please do not hesitate to reach out should you have any further questions on this important issue.

Regards,

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