

An Open Letter to ECFiber Subscribers from GWI

To the Residents and Subscribers of East Central Vermont Telecommunications District:

At GWI, we have taken great pride in delivering high-quality, reliable internet service to you and the communities served by ECFiber since January 1, 2023, after our friendly assumption of service from ValleyNet allowed us to employ all of the staff. Our commitment to this work has been unwavering, and we remain focused on maintaining that same level of excellence through the end of our agreement on December 31, 2025.

However, we believe it is our responsibility to speak candidly with you about serious concerns that now threaten the continuity and quality of your internet service after that date, when GWI's experienced and dedicated employees, who have strung the fiber, set up the internet in your homes, and responded to your calls—many for over a decade as former ValleyNet staff—will no longer be available.

Earlier this year, ECFiber chose to end its relationship with GWI and appoint a brand-new, untested operator known as VISPO. This decision was made behind closed doors, against ECFiber's own stated policies against conflicts of interest, without a public bidding process or a transparent opportunity for qualified providers—including GWI—to participate. Interestingly, VISPO was created, by ECFiber's design, to exist outside the public eye, and free from Vermont's open meeting requirements. This surely only benefits the handful of formerly volunteer governing board members who now enjoy directorships with regular stipends of undisclosed amounts out of the public view and with a contract they awarded themselves with an undisclosed budget. While GWI has been transparent about its costs, ECFiber has not been transparent about the costs that it will incur setting up VISPO, nor has it released VISPO's budget. How does this benefit the residents of the District?

Even worse, VISPO has no employees, no experience, and no demonstrated capacity to manage a broadband network of this complexity. In any open and competitive selection process, it is difficult to imagine VISPO being selected to lead such a critical community utility.

Unfortunately, this course of action already appears to be having consequences. Just recently, S&P Global Ratings downgraded ECFiber's credit outlook to "negative," citing concerns with the transition away from GWI and the uncertainty surrounding its replacement. This should give every subscriber pause: the stability and financial health of your broadband provider directly impact your service and its future. Moreover, these actions threaten to raise the cost and availability of service to all customers.

Let us be clear: we want nothing more than for ECFiber subscribers to continue receiving excellent service. But that responsibility now rests with the decisions made by ECFiber and its leadership—decisions that we fear are driven more by internal politics and self-dealing and the financial benefit of stipends to a few formerly volunteer members and their new company than by what's in the best interest of the communities we all serve.

We urge ECFiber's governing board to reconsider the direction it has chosen. There is still time to put in place an open process for selecting a qualified, experienced operator who can ensure a smooth and responsible transition. The stakes—your internet access, service reliability, and regional connectivity—are simply too high to entrust to an unproven startup.

Until the conclusion of our contract at the end of 2025, GWI remains fully committed to serving you with the professionalism, integrity, and technical excellence you have come to expect from us and that you deserve.

If you share our concerns, now is the time to act. Please contact your Town's representatives to ECFiber and ask them to:

1. Demand transparency by requiring VISPO to comply with Vermont's open meeting laws, just as any nonprofit benefit corporation acting for and on behalf of a Communications Union District should.
2. Support a competitive RFP process for long-term network operations, ensuring that only a qualified internet service provider is selected to deliver reliable and sustainable service.

You can find your town's representatives and their contact information at:

<https://ecvtd.gov/member-towns/>

Sincerely,

Great Works Internet (GWI)

Operator for ECFiber through December 31, 2025