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Rural fiber penetration now stands at 23%, according to a study conducted by Pivot Group (parent company of Telecompetitor) and sponsored by Innovative Systems. In comparison to national numbers, market research firm RVA, LLC [reported](#) just over 20 million homes were connected to fiber in 2019, or 44% of homes passed. This roughly equates to 16% penetration of all households nationally (as of 2019).

The 6th Annual Rural Video and Broadband Industry Study from [Pivot Group](#) also found that cable broadband penetration leads all access technologies in rural America at 39%. DSL ranked at 14%, followed by fixed wireless at 10% and satellite broadband at 6%. Roughly 8% of rural households are using their cell phone plan for internet access.

Fixed wireless and satellite broadband penetration in rural markets will be interesting numbers to watch in the coming years as RDOF and other government sponsored programs are funding growth for these access technologies in underserved and unserved rural markets.

Fiber broadband has the highest satisfaction among rural internet subscribers at 8.1 on a 10-point scale, where 10 indicates completely satisfied. Surprisingly, fixed wireless was rated second after fiber broadband at 7.9. The average satisfaction rating was 7.6. DSL is under performing at 7.1. Most rural consumers are satisfied with their current broadband speed, but close to 1/3 indicate they would like to see faster speeds, highlighting an opportunity for rural broadband carriers.

Rural fiber penetration is helping drive usage of internet applications including streaming. Forty-nine percent of rural households are now streaming including 68% of 18–34-year-olds. On the flip side, 43% of rural TV subscribers do not stream at all. Other key findings from the study, which surveyed over 800 rural internet subscribers:

- Access to local channels and bundling Internet are users' top two reasons for staying with their current TV provider.
- Close to 1/2 of rural customers bundle Internet and TV.
- Just over 1/4 of rural customers have managed Wi-Fi, and more than 1/3 are interested in it. – [Telecompetitor](#)

A House subcommittee is investigating YouTube Kids, saying the Google-owned video feeds children inappropriate material in "a wasteland of vapid, consumerist content" so it can serve them ads. The inquiry comes despite [Google agreeing to pay \\$170 million in 2019](#) to settle allegations that YouTube collected personal data on children without their parents' consent.

In a letter sent Tuesday to YouTube CEO Susan Wojcicki, the U.S. House Oversight and Reform subcommittee on economic and consumer policy said YouTube does not do enough to protect kids from material that could harm them. Instead it relies on artificial intelligence and creators' self-regulation to decide what videos make it on to the platform, according to the letter. And despite changes in the wake of the 2019 settlement, the letter notes, YouTube Kids still shows ads to children. But instead of basing it on kids' online activity,

it now targets it based on the videos they are watching. YouTube did not immediately respond to a message for comment.

The congressional investigation comes a year into the pandemic that has shuttered schools and left parents who are working from home increasingly reliant on services such as YouTube to keep kids occupied. This has led to a rethinking of “screen time” rules and guilt over the amount of time kids spend in front of screens, with some experts recommending that parents focus on quality, not quantity.

But lawmakers say YouTube Kids is anything but quality. “YouTube Kids spends no time or effort determining the appropriateness of content before it becomes available for children to watch,” the letter says. “YouTube Kids allows content creators to self-regulate. YouTube only asks that they consider factors including the subject matter of the video, whether the video has an emphasis on kids characters, themes, toys or games, and more.” Kids under 13 are protected by a 1998 federal law that requires parental consent before companies can collect and share their personal information.

Under the 2019 settlement, Google agreed to work with video creators to label material aimed at kids. It said it would limit data collection when users view such videos, regardless of their age. But lawmakers say even after the settlement, YouTube Kids, which launched in 2015, continued to exploit loopholes and advertise to children. While it does not target ads based on viewer interests the way the main YouTube service does, it tracks information about what kids are watching in order to recommend videos. It also collects personally identifying device information.

There are also other, sneaky ways ads are reaching children. A “high volume” of kids’ videos, the letter says, smuggle hidden marketing and advertising with product placements by “children’s influencers,” who are often children themselves. “YouTube does not appear to be trying to prevent such problematic marketing,” the letter says. The House research team found that only 4% of videos it looked at had a “high educational value” offering developmentally appropriate material.

The kids app has helped turn YouTube into an increasingly more attractive outlet for the advertising sales that generate most of the profits for Google and its corporate parent, Alphabet. YouTube brought in nearly \$20 billion in ad revenue last year, more than doubling from its total just three years ago. The video site now accounts for about 13% of Google’s total ad sales, up from slightly more than 8% in 2017.

The House subcommittee is recommending YouTube turn off advertisements completely for kids aged 7 and under. It also asks that it give parents the ability to turn off the “autoplay” feature, which is not currently possible (though parents are able to set a timer to limit their kids’ video watching). The lawmakers are asking YouTube to provide them with information on YouTube Kids’ top videos, channels and revenue information, as well as average time spent and number of videos watched, per user, among other information.

– **TVNewsCheck**

Repeat driving under the influence offenders could find themselves wearing a device to detect the presence of alcohol to avoid incarceration under legislation that passed the PA House of Representatives on Tuesday by a 143-58 vote.

The bill, sponsored by Rep. Todd Stephens, R-Montgomery County, seeks to put into law a practice that several counties in Pennsylvania already have implemented, giving judges the option of requiring an alcohol monitoring device as a condition of bail, probation or parole in cases where an individual has one or more prior DUI offenses. The legislation would give the courts the discretion to determine which devices can be used – and the individual is required to bear the cost of the device. However, an amendment added to the bill requires the court to consider an individual's ability to pay the associated costs when ordering a substance monitoring device.

The technology could be a continuous alcohol monitoring device that an individual wears that automatically and frequently tests for the presence of alcohol. Or it could be a mobile breathing device or some other alcohol monitoring technology. Additionally, the court could order random drug testing or any other controlled substance monitoring technology. "This bill is about using technology that is available to us today that wasn't available to us before to do a couple of things," Stephens said. "By utilizing this technology, we can reduce our jail populations for our counties. We can reduce our costs to our taxpayers, and we can increase public safety by reducing recidivism with DUI."

The American Civil Liberties Union-Pennsylvania opposed the bill because of how it permits the courts to impose surveillance with this technology not only as a condition of probation but also pre-trial, among other reasons, said Rep. Greg Vitali, D-Delaware County. A provisions in the bill that addresses changes to the Accelerated Rehabilitative Disposition program, a diversionary program for non-violent offenders with no prior or limited record, drew some debate. The changes arise out of a 2020 Superior Court ruling that found a defendant's acceptance of ARD in a DUI case cannot count as a prior offense when it comes to grading and penalties for future DUI violations.

This bill would change that to require an individual, before receiving ARD, admit the commonwealth's evidence would prove they violated the law, agree their admission may be used as a prior conviction to increase the grading and penalty of subsequent offenses; and waive the right to challenge the use of ARD as a prior conviction.

Some Democratic lawmakers argued that these changes would eroded the benefits of the ARD program. Rep. Dan Miller, D-Allegheny County, who unsuccessfully argued it was unconstitutional, said it essentially would count what is considered a non-conviction of a DUI offense as a conviction and hold that against an individual when it comes to determining the penalty for any future DUI offenses. Stephens countered that a defendant doesn't have to enter ARD. If they do, they are making a deal with the prosecutor saying they are "going to toe the line and avoid any further criminal behavior" knowing there are consequences if they don't. – *Pennlive*

