## STATE OF NEW YORK

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6441

2021-2022 Regular Sessions

## IN ASSEMBLY

March 17, 2021

Introduced by M. of A. KELLES -- read once and referred to the Committee on Corporations, Authorities and Commissions

AN ACT to amend the public service law, in relation to communications union districts

## The People of the State of New York, represented in Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows:

1 Section 1. The public service law is amended by adding a new article 2 12 to read as follows:

3 ARTICLE 12 4 COMMUNICATIONS UNION DISTRICTS 5 Section 250. Definitions. 6 251. Formation. 7 252. District composition. 8 253. Creation; duration; noncontestability. 9 254. District powers. 10 255. Communications plant; sites. 256. Limitations; taxes; indebtedness. 11 12 257. Board authority. 258. Board composition. 13 14 259. Appointment. 15 260. Organizational meeting. 261. Quorum. 16 17 262. Voting. 263. Term. 18 19 264. Vacancy. 20 265. Compensation of representatives. 21 266. Officers; bond. 22 267. Clerk. 268. Treasurer. 23 269. Audit. 24 25 270. Committees.

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1 <u>271. Compensation of officers.</u>

272. Recall of officers.

3 <u>273. Fiscal year.</u>

274. Budget.

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275. Indebtedness.

276. Pledge of revenues

277. Sinking and reserve funds.

278. Service fees.

279. Special meetings.

280. Withdrawal of a member municipality.

281. Admission of district members.

282. Dissolution.

§ 250. Definitions. As used in this article, the following terms shall have the following meanings:

- 1. "Communications plant" means any and all parts of any communications system owned by a district, whether using wires, cables, fiber optics, wireless, other technologies, or a combination thereof, and used for the purpose of transporting or storing information, in whatever forms, directions, and media, together with any improvements thereto constructed or acquired, and all other facilities, equipment, and appurtenances necessary or appropriate to such system. The term "communications plant" and any regulatory implications or any restrictions under this article regarding a "communications plant" shall not apply to facilities or portions of any communications facilities intended for use by, and solely used by, a district member and its own officers and employees in the operation of municipal departments or systems of which such communications are merely an ancillary component.
- 28 2. "Communications plant improvements" shall mean improvements that
  29 may be used for the benefit of the public, whether or not publicly owned
  30 or operated.
  - 3. "Communications union district" or "district" means a collection of two or more contiguous municipalities or communities that agree to jointly operate a communications plant to all residents of such municipalities, as provided under this article.
  - 4. "District member" or "member" means a municipality that elects to form or join a communications union district under this article.
  - 5. "Governing board" or "board" means the governing board of the communications union district as established under this article.
  - 6. "Long-term contract" means an agreement in which a district incurs direct or conditional obligations for which the costs are too great to be paid out of the ordinary annual income and revenues of such district, in the judgment of the board.
    - 7. "Municipality" means any county, city, town, or village.
  - § 251. Formation. 1. Any two or more contiguous municipalities in this state shall be permitted to form a communications union district for the delivery of communications services and the operation of a communications plant, which district shall be a body politic and corporate.
- 2. A municipality electing to form a district under this article shall submit to the eligible voters of such municipality at an annual or special meeting a proposition in substantially the following form:
- "Shall the (town/village/city) of (name of municipality) enter into a communications union district to be known as (name of proposed district), under the provisions of article 12 of the public service law?".
- 55 <u>3. Additional municipalities may be admitted to the district in the</u> 56 <u>manner provided in section two hundred eighty-one of this article.</u>

§ 252. District composition. A district formed under this article shall be composed of and include all lands and residents within its member municipalities, and any other municipality subsequently admitted to such district as provided in this article, except for any municipalities that withdraw as provided in this article. Registered voters in each member municipality shall be eligible to vote in all district meetings, but only district member representatives shall be eligible to vote in meetings of the district's governing board.

- § 253. Creation; duration; noncontestability. 1. Following the organizational meeting held pursuant to section two hundred sixty of this article, a district's governing board shall cause to be filed with the state board of elections a certificate attesting to the vote conducted under subdivision two of section two hundred fifty-one of this article.
- 2. A district formed under this article shall continue as a body politic and corporate unless and until dissolved according to the procedures set forth in this article.
- 3. An action shall not be brought directly or indirectly challenging, questioning, or in any manner contesting the legality of the formation, or the existence as a body corporate and politic of any communications union district created under this article after six months from the date of the recording in the state board of elections of the certificate required by subdivision one of this section. An action shall not be brought directly or indirectly challenging, questioning, or in any manner contesting the legality or validity of any bonds issued to defray costs of communications plant improvements approved by the board, after six months from the date upon which the board voted affirmatively to issue such bonds.
- 4. This section shall be liberally construed to serve the legislative purpose to validate and make certain the legal existence of all communications union districts in this state and the validity of bonds issued or authorized for communications plant improvements, and to bar every remedy therefor notwithstanding any defects or irregularities, jurisdictional or otherwise, after expiration of the six-month period. The provisions of this subdivision and subdivision three of this section shall also apply to financial contracts directly related to the district's bonding authority.
- 5. To the extent a district constructs communications infrastructure with the intent of providing communications services, such district shall ensure that any and all losses from such services, or in the event such services are abandoned or curtailed, any and all costs associated with the investment in communications infrastructure, shall be not borne by the taxpayers of district members.
- § 254. District powers. Subject to the limitations and restrictions set forth in section two hundred fifty-six of this article, a district created under this article shall have the power to:
- 1. operate, cause to be operated, or contract for the construction, ownership, management, financing, and operation of a communications plant for the delivery of communications services;
  - 2. purchase, sell, lease, own, acquire, convey, mortgage, improve, and use real and personal property in connection with its purpose;
    - 3. hire and fix the compensation and terms of employment of employees;
- 52 <u>4. sue and be sued;</u>
  - enter into contracts for any term or duration;
- 54 <u>6. contract with architects, engineers, financial and legal consult-</u> 55 <u>ants, and others for professional services;</u>

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7. contract with individuals, corporations, associations, authorities, and agencies for services and property, including the assumption of the liabilities and assets thereof;

- 8. provide communications services for its district members, including the residential and business locations located therein; and to provide communications services for such other residential and business locations as its facilities and obligations may allow, provided such other locations shall be in a municipality that is contiguous with the municipal limits of a district member;
- 9. contract with the state of New York, the United States, or any subdivision or agency thereof for services, assistance, or joint ventures;
- 13 <u>10. contract with any municipality for the services of any officers or</u> 14 <u>employees of such municipality;</u>
- 15 <u>11. promote cooperative arrangements and coordinated action among its</u> 16 <u>members and other public and private entities;</u>
- 17 <u>12. make recommendations for review and action to its members and</u> 18 <u>other public agencies which perform functions within the region in which</u> 19 <u>its members are located;</u>
- 20 <u>13. exercise any other powers which are necessary or desirable for</u>
  21 <u>dealing with communications matters of mutual concern and that are exer-</u>
  22 <u>cised or are capable of exercise by any of its members;</u>
- 23 <u>14. enter into financing agreements authorized under law, or alterna-</u> 24 <u>tive means of financing capital improvements and operations authorized</u> 25 <u>under law;</u>
- 26 <u>15. establish a budget to provide for the funding thereof out of</u> 27 <u>general revenue of the district;</u>
  - 16. appropriate and expend monies;
- 29 <u>17. establish sinking and reserve funds for retiring and securing its</u> 30 <u>obligations;</u>
- 31 <u>18. establish capital reserve funds and make appropriations thereto</u> 32 <u>for communications plant improvements and the financing thereof;</u>
- 19. enact and enforce any and all necessary or desirable bylaws for the orderly conduct of its affairs for carrying out its communications purpose and for protection of its communications property;
- 36 <u>20. solicit, accept, and administer gifts, grants, and bequests in</u> 37 <u>trust or otherwise for its purpose;</u>
  - 21. exercise all powers incident to a public corporation;
- 39 <u>22. adopt a name under which it shall be known and shall conduct busi-</u> 40 <u>ness; and</u>
  - 23. establish an effective date of its creation.
- § 255. Communications plant; sites. Each member shall make available for lease to the district one or more sites for a communications plant or components thereof within such member municipality.
- § 256. Limitations; taxes; indebtedness. 1. Notwithstanding any grant
  of authority in this article to the contrary, a district shall not
  accept funds generated by a member's taxing or assessment power.
- 2. Notwithstanding any grant of authority in this article to the contrary, a district shall not have the power to levy, assess, apportion, or collect any tax upon property within such district, nor upon any of its members, without specific authorization of the state legislature.
- 53 3. Notwithstanding any grant of authority in this article to the 54 contrary, every issue of a district's notes and bonds shall be payable 55 only out of any revenues or monies of such district.

§ 257. Board authority. The legislative power and authority of a district and the administration and the general supervision of all fiscal, prudential, and governmental affairs of such district shall be vested in a legislative body known as the governing board, except as specifically provided otherwise in this article.

- § 258. Board composition. A district governing board shall be composed of one representative from each member and one or more alternates to serve in the absence of such designated representative.
- § 259. Appointment. Annually on or before the last Monday in April commencing in the year following the date of a district's creation, the legislative body of each member shall appoint a representative and one or more alternates to the governing board for one-year terms. Appointments of representatives and alternates shall be in writing, signed by the chair of the legislative body of the appointing member, and presented to the clerk of the district. The legislative body of a member, by majority vote, may replace its appointed representative or alternate at any time and shall promptly notify the district clerk of such replacement.
- § 260. Organizational meeting. Annually, on the second Tuesday in May following the appointments contemplated pursuant to section two hundred fifty-nine of this article, the board shall hold its organizational meeting. At such meeting, the board shall elect from among its appointed representatives a chair and a vice chair, each of whom shall hold office for one year and until his or her successor is duly elected.
- § 261. Quorum. For the purpose of transacting business, the presence of delegates or alternates representing more than fifty percent of district members shall constitute a quorum. Notwithstanding such requirement, a smaller number may adjourn to another date. Any action adopted by a majority of the votes cast at a meeting of the board at which a quorum is present shall be the action of the board, except as otherwise provided in this article.
- § 262. Voting. Each district member's delegation shall be entitled to cast one vote.
- § 263. Term. Unless replaced in the manner provided in section two hundred fifty-nine of this article, a representative on a governing board shall hold office until his or her successor is duly appointed. Any representative or alternate may be reappointed to successive terms without limit.
- § 264. Vacancy. Any vacancy on a board shall be filled within thirty days after such vacancy occurs by appointment by the authority which appointed the representative or alternate whose position has become vacant. An appointee to a vacancy shall serve until the expiration of the term of the representative or alternate to whose position the appointment was made and may thereafter be reappointed.
- § 265. Compensation of representatives. Each district member may reimburse its representative to the governing board for expenses as it determines reasonable, except as provided in section two hundred seventy-one of this article with respect to district officers.
- § 266. Officers; bond. 1. The officers of a district shall be composed of the chair and the vice chair of the board, the clerk of the district, and the treasurer of the district. Prior to assuming their offices, officers may be required to post bond in such amounts as shall be determined by resolution of the board. The cost of such bond shall be borne by the district.
  - 2. The chair shall preside at all meetings of the board and shall make and sign all contracts on behalf of the district upon approval by the

board. The chair shall perform all duties incident to the position and
fice as required by the laws of the state.

- 3. During the absence of or inability of the chair to render or perform his or her duties or exercise his or her powers, the same shall be performed and exercised by the vice chair and when so acting, the vice chair shall have all the powers and be subject to all the responsibilities hereby given to or imposed upon the chair.
- 4. During the absence or inability of the vice chair to render or perform his or her duties or exercise his or her powers, the board shall elect from among its membership an acting vice chair who shall have the powers and be subject to all the responsibilities given or imposed upon the vice chair by this article.
- 5. Upon the death, disability, resignation, or removal of the chair or vice chair, the board shall elect a successor to such vacant office until the next annual meeting.
  - § 267. Clerk. The clerk of a district shall be appointed by the board, and shall serve at its pleasure. The clerk shall not be required to be a member of the governing board. The clerk shall have the exclusive charge and custody of the records of the district and the seal of the district. The clerk shall record all votes and proceedings of the district, including district and board meetings, and shall prepare and cause to be posted and published all warnings of meetings of such meetings. Following approval by the board, the clerk shall cause the annual report to be distributed to the legislative bodies of the district members. The clerk shall prepare and distribute any other reports required by state law and resolutions or regulations of the board. The clerk shall perform all duties and functions incident to the office of secretary or clerk of a body corporate.
  - § 268. Treasurer. The treasurer of a district shall be appointed by the board, and shall serve at its pleasure. The treasurer shall not be a member of the governing board. The treasurer shall have the exclusive charge and custody of the funds of the district and shall be the disbursing officer of the district. When authorized by the board, the treasurer may sign, make, or endorse in the name of the district all checks and orders for the payment of money and pay out and disburse the same and receipt therefor. The treasurer shall keep a record of every obligation issued and contract entered into by the district and of every payment thereon. The treasurer shall keep correct books of account of all the business and transactions of the district and such other books and accounts as the board may require. The treasurer shall render a statement of the condition of the finances of the district at each reqular meeting of the board and at such other times as shall be required of the treasurer. The treasurer shall prepare the annual financial statement and the budget of the district for distribution, upon approval of the board, to the legislative bodies of district members. The treasurer shall do and perform all of the duties required for the office of treasurer of a body politic and corporate. Upon removal or the treasurer's termination from office by virtue of removal or resignation, the treasurer shall immediately pay over to his or her successor all of the funds belonging to the district and deliver to such successor all official books and papers.
  - § 269. Audit. Once a district becomes operational, the board shall cause an audit of the financial condition of the district to be performed annually by an independent professional accounting firm.
  - § 270. Committees. The board shall have authority to establish one or more committees and grant and delegate to such committees such powers as

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1 it deems necessary. Members of an executive committee shall serve stag-2 gered terms and shall be board members. Membership on other committees 3 established by the board shall not be restricted to board members.

- § 271. Compensation of officers. Officers of a district shall be paid from district funds such compensation or reimbursement of expenses, or both, as determined by the board.
- 7 <u>§ 272. Recall of officers. An officer may be removed by a two-thirds</u> 8 <u>vote of the board whenever, in its judgment, the best interest of the</u> 9 <u>district shall be served by such removal.</u>
- 10 <u>§ 273. Fiscal year. The fiscal year of a district shall commence on</u>
  11 January first and end on December thirty-first of each year.
- § 274. Budget. 1. Annually, on or before October twenty-first, a board shall approve and cause to be distributed to the legislative body of each district member for review and comment an annual report of its activities, together with a financial statement, a proposed district budget for the following fiscal year, and a forecast presenting anticipated year-end results. Such proposed budget shall include reasonably detailed estimates of:
  - (a) deficits and surpluses from prior fiscal years;
  - (b) anticipated expenditures for the administration of the district;
- 21 (c) anticipated expenditures for the operation and maintenance of any 22 district communications plant;
- 23 <u>(d) payments due on obligations, long-term contracts, leases, and</u> 24 <u>financing agreements;</u>
- 25 <u>(e) payments due to any sinking funds for the retirement of district</u>
  26 <u>obligations</u>;
  - (f) payments due to any capital or financing reserve funds;
  - (g) anticipated revenues from all sources; and
- 29 (h) such other estimates as the board deems necessary to accomplish 30 its purpose.
  - 2. A board shall hold a public hearing on or before November fifteenth of each year to receive comments from the legislative bodies of district members and hear all other interested persons regarding the proposed budget. Notice of such hearing shall be given to the legislative bodies of district members at least fifteen days prior to such hearing. The board shall give consideration to all comments received and make such changes to the proposed budget as it deems beneficial.
- 38 3. Annually, on or before December fifteenth, a board shall adopt the budget and appropriate the sums it deems necessary to meet its obligations and operate and carry out the district's functions for the following fiscal year.
- 42 4. Actions or resolutions of a board for the annual appropriations of 43 any year shall not cease to be operative at the end of the fiscal year for which they were adopted. Appropriations made by the board for the 44 45 various estimates of the budget shall be expended only for such esti-46 mates, but by majority vote of the board the budget may be amended from 47 time to time to transfer funds between or among such estimates. Any balance left or unencumbered in any such budget estimate, or the amount 48 of any deficit at the end of the fiscal year, shall be included in and 49 paid out of the operating budget and appropriations in the following 50 51 fiscal year. All such budget amendments shall be reported by the district treasurer to the legislative bodies of each district member 52 53 within fourteen days of the end of the fiscal year.
- 5. Financial statements and audit results shall be delivered to the legislative bodies of each district member within ten days of delivery to the board.

A. 6441

 § 275. Indebtedness. A board may borrow money through the issuance of notes of its district for the purpose of paying current expenses of such district. Such notes shall mature within one year, and may be refunded in the manner provided by law, and shall be payable solely from the district's operating revenues. The governing board may borrow money in anticipation of the receipt of grants-in-aid from any source and any revenues. Such notes shall mature within one year, but may be renewed as otherwise provided by law.

§ 276. Pledge of revenues. 1. When a board, at a regular or special meeting called for such purpose, determines by resolution passed by a vote of a majority of members present and voting that the public interest or necessity demands communications plant improvements, or a long-term contract, and that the cost of such improvements or long-term contract will be too great to be paid out of the ordinary annual income and revenue of the district, the board may pledge communications plant net revenues and enter into long-term contracts to provide for such improvements.

2. The pledge of communications plant net revenues, and other obligations allowed by law, may be authorized for any purpose permitted by this article, or any other applicable law.

§ 277. Sinking and reserve funds. 1. A board may establish and provide for sinking and reserve funds, however denominated, for the retirement and security of pledges of communications plant net revenue, or for long-term contracts. When established, such funds shall be kept intact and separate from other monies at the disposal of the district, and shall be accounted for as a pledged asset for the purpose of retiring or securing such obligations or contracts. The cost of payments to any sinking or reserve fund shall be included in the annual budget of the district.

2. A board shall establish and provide for a capital reserve fund to pay for communications plant improvements, replacement of worn out buildings and equipment, and planned and unplanned major repairs in furtherance of the purpose for which the district was created. Any such capital reserve fund shall be kept in a separate account and invested as are other public funds and shall be expended for such purposes for which established. The cost of payments to any capital reserve fund shall be included in the annual budget of the district.

§ 278. Service fees. A board may from time to time establish and adjust service, subscription, access, and utility fees for the purpose of generating revenues from the operation of its communications plant.

§ 279. Special meetings. 1. A board may call a special meeting of the district when it deems it necessary or prudent to do so and shall call a special meeting of the district when action by the voters is necessary under this article. The board shall call a special meeting upon receipt of a petition signed by at least five percent of the registered voters within its district, or upon request of at least twenty-five percent of district members evidenced by formal resolutions of the legislative bodies of such members or by petitions signed by at least five percent of the member's registered voters. The board may rescind the call of a special meeting called by it but not a special meeting called as provided in this subdivision. The board may schedule the date of such special meetings to coincide with the date of annual municipal meetings, primary elections, general elections, or similar meetings when the electorate within the district members will be voting on other matters.

2. At any special meeting of a district, voters of each district member shall cast their ballots at such polling places within the muni-

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1 cipality of their residence as shall be determined by the board of the 2 district in cooperation with the board of elections of each district 3 member.

- 3. Not less than three nor more than fourteen days prior to any special meeting, at least one public hearing shall be held by the board at which time the issues under consideration shall be presented and comments received. Notice of such public hearing shall include the publication of a warning in a newspaper of general circulation in the district at least once a week, on the same day of the week, for three consecutive weeks, the last such publication not less than five nor more than ten days before the public hearing. Such notice may be included in the warning called for in subdivision four of this section.
- 4. The board shall provide notice of a special meeting by filing a notice with the clerk of each district member and by posting a notice in at least five public places in each municipality in the district not less than thirty nor more than forty days before such meeting. In addition, such notice shall be published in a newspaper of general circulation in the district once a week on the same day of the week for three consecutive weeks before such meeting, the last such publication to be not less than five nor more than ten days before such meeting.
- 5. The original notice of any special meeting of the district shall be signed by a majority of the board and shall be filed with the clerk before being posted.
  - 6. The posted and published notices for special meetings under this section shall include the date, time, place, and nature of the meeting. Such notices shall, by separate articles, specifically indicate the business to be transacted and the questions to be voted upon at such meeting.
  - 7. All legal voters of a district's members shall be legal voters of such district. The district members shall post and revise checklists in the same manner as for municipal meetings prior to any district meeting at which there will be voting.
  - § 280. Withdrawal of a member municipality. A district member may withdraw from its district upon the following terms and conditions:
- 35 1. Prior to such district pledging communications plant net revenues, or entering into a long-term contract, or contract subject to annual 36 appropriation, a district member may vote to withdraw in the same manner 37 as the vote for admission to the district. If a majority of the voters 38 of a district member present and voting at a meeting for such purpose 39 40 votes to withdraw from the district, the vote shall be certified by the 41 clerk of such municipality and presented to the board. Following the 42 presentation of such vote to the board, the board shall give notice to 43 the remaining district members of such vote to withdraw and shall hold a 44 meeting to determine if it is in the best interest of such district to continue to exist. Representatives of the district members shall be 45 46 given an opportunity to be heard at such meeting together with any other 47 interested persons. After such a meeting, the board may declare the district dissolved or it may declare that the district shall continue to 48 exist despite the withdrawal of such member. The membership of the with-49 50 drawing municipality shall terminate after the vote to withdraw.
- 2. After such district has pledged communications plant net revenues, or entered into a long-term contract or contract subject to annual appropriations, a district member may vote to withdraw in the same manner as the vote for admission to such district.
  - § 281. Admission of district members. A board may authorize the inclusion of additional district members in the communications union district

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upon such terms and conditions as it in its sole discretion shall deem 1 2 to be fair, reasonable, and in the best interest of such district. The 3 legislative body of any nonmember municipality which desires to be admitted to such district shall make application for admission to the 4 5 board. The board shall determine the financial, economic, governance, 6 and operational effects that are likely to occur if such municipality is 7 admitted and thereafter either grant or deny authority for admission of 8 such petitioning municipality. If the board grants such authority, it 9 shall also specify any terms and conditions, including financial obli-10 gations, upon which such admission is predicated. Upon resolution of the 11 board, such applicant municipality shall become a district member.

§ 282. Dissolution. 1. If a board by resolution approved by two-thirds of all the votes entitled to be cast determines that it is in the best interests of the public, the district members, and the district that such district be dissolved, and if such district then has no outstanding obligations under pledges of communications plant net revenue, long-term contracts, or contracts subject to annual appropriation, or will have no such debt or obligation upon completion of the plan of dissolution, it shall prepare a plan of dissolution and adopt a resolution directing that the question of such dissolution and the plan of dissolution be submitted to the voters of such district at a special meeting, for which notice shall be duly provided for such purpose. If a majority of the voters of such district present and voting at such special meeting shall vote to dissolve such district and approve the plan of dissolution, such district shall cease to conduct its affairs except insofar as may be necessary for the winding up thereof. The board shall immediately cause a notice of the proposed dissolution to be mailed to each known creditor of such district and shall proceed to collect the assets of such district and apply and distribute them in accordance with the plan of dissolution.

- 2. The plan of dissolution shall:
- (a) identify and value all unencumbered assets;
- (b) identify and value all encumbered assets;
- 34 (c) identify all creditors and the nature or amount of all liabilities 35 and obligations;
  - (d) identify all obligations under long-term contracts and contracts subject to annual appropriation;
- (e) specify the means by which assets of such district shall be liquidated and all liabilities and obligations paid and discharged, or adequate provision made for the satisfaction thereof;
  - (f) specify the means by which any assets remaining after discharge of all liabilities shall be liquidated if necessary; and
  - (g) specify that any assets remaining after payment of all liabilities shall be apportioned and distributed among the district members according to a formula based upon population.
  - 3. When the plan of dissolution has been implemented, the board shall adopt a resolution certifying such implementation to the district members, whereupon such district shall be terminated, and notice thereof shall be delivered to the temporary president of the senate and the speaker of the assembly in anticipation of confirmation of dissolution by the state legislature.
- 52 § 2. This act shall take effect on the first of January next succeed-53 ing the date on which it shall have become a law.