

October 7, 2019

Senator Richard Shelby
Chairman, Senate Appropriations Committee
304 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Representative Nita Lowey
Chairwoman, House Appropriations Committee
2365 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Senator Patrick Leahy
Vice Chairman, Senate Appropriations
Committee
437 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Representative Kay Granger
Ranking Member, House Appropriations
Committee
1026 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Chairman Shelby, Chairwoman Lowey, Vice Chairman Leahy, and Ranking Member Granger,

As you consider appropriations for government programs in Fiscal Year 2020, we strongly urge you to continue significant funding for the deployment of broadband in rural America.

We are a diverse group of stakeholders representing a broad spectrum of rural interests. We believe the health and productivity of the people we represent throughout rural America are dependent on access to high-quality broadband. We support the House of Representatives' inclusion of \$605 million in their Agriculture Appropriations bill for the USDA Broadband ReConnect Program.

The ReConnect program is designed to offer loans and grants to finance broadband in the rural areas lacking sufficient broadband access. Earlier this year, the U.S. Department of Agriculture accepted applications for a first round of funding from the program. The total amount of money requested in the initial round of applications already far exceeds the funds currently available for the program. We believe that initial demand represents a mere fraction of the total investment needed going forward to close the digital divide.

USDA has signaled that much of the money previously allocated for the ReConnect program will be committed in the coming weeks to the first tranche of awardees. We are concerned that a lapse in appropriations in Fiscal Year 2020 will deny funds for those communities in need of broadband and interested in pursuing ReConnect funding. Continued direct federal investment is critical to closing the digital divide and enabling rural consumers to fully participate in our 21st Century economy and society.

As your deliberations continue, we encourage you to maintain these critical investments in rural America. Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

National Rural Electric Cooperative Association
Association of Equipment Manufacturers
Center for Rural Affairs

CoBank
Council for Affordable & Rural Housing
Farm Bureau

Farm Credit Council
 Institute for Local Self-Reliance
 National Associations of County Organizations
 National Association of Development Organizations
 National Association of Towns and Townships
 National Cooperative Business Association CLUSA International
 National Council of Farmer Cooperatives
 National Farmers Union
 National Grange

National League of Cities
 National Milk Producers Federation
 National Rural Health Association
 National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation
 NC Rural Center
 NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association
 Rural Community Assistance Partnership, Inc.
 Utilities Technology Council
 WTA — Advocates for Rural Broadband



National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation

