



June 2nd, 2025

The Honorable Susan Collins
Chair, Senate Committee on Appropriations
S-128, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Appropriations
S-128, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chair, House Committee on Appropriations
H-307, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member, House Committee on Appropriations
1038 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairwoman Collins, Ranking Member Murray, Chairman Cole and Ranking Member DeLauro:

The stakeholders below represent a broad cross-section of entities with a vested interest in the vitality and long-term viability of rural America. From producing food to sustain the nation to providing critical connectivity and energy for rural communities, and from educating rural students to caring for the medical needs of rural residents, the organizations below and members of them play a critical role in powering the American economy and ensuring that rural areas thrive.

Given the foundational importance of robust and reliable connectivity to our respective and shared missions in rural America, we write to you today in support of sufficient Fiscal Year 2026 funding for the telecommunications programs overseen by the Rural Utilities Service (RUS) within the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). These popular and effective telecom programs, which have historically received robust bipartisan support from the Appropriations and Agriculture Committees in both the House and Senate and across multiple presidential administrations, help to finance the deployment of advanced networks that enable the efficient delivery of broadband and voice services across rural America. Over the past 15 years alone, USDA has invested over \$13 billion in loan and grant funding to support telecom projects throughout rural areas.

Not only do the funding programs administered by RUS help rural America get connected, but the agency's telecommunications and broadband program loans must be paid back with interest – creating a win-win situation for rural consumers and American taxpayers. Among these critical initiatives is the Rural Telecommunications Loan Program (“Telecom Loan Program”). For decades, the Telecom Loan Program has been essential in enabling the construction, maintenance, improvement, and expansion of voice and broadband services in rural America – and it continues to play a substantial role today as providers upgrade their networks to keep pace with consumer demands. Moreover, since 2010, borrowers under the Telecom Loan Program have paid back about \$2.5 billion to the U.S. Treasury – not including interest – with default rates ranging from

0.08% to less than 0.5%, underscoring how this program accrues to the benefit of the federal budget and the national economy.

Congress's continued support for funding RUS telecommunications and broadband programs remains vital. A strong public-private partnership is essential to America's quest to secure and maintain global broadband preeminence. Given our shared interest in ensuring the long-term success and well-being of rural America, and in light of the positive return for the national budget arising out of the agency's lending efforts at a time when budgetary pressures are significant, it is our hope you will maintain support for RUS' telecommunications programs.

Sincerely,

NTCA–The Rural Broadband Association

The Fertilizer Institute

National Association of Rural Health Clinics

National Milk Producers Federation

Power and Communication Contractors Association

Rural Local Initiatives Support Corporation

National Association of Counties

National Association of Towns and Townships

CoBank

National Rural Water Association

National Rural Economic Development Association

Center for Rural Affairs

National Rural Education Association

Farm Credit Council

National Association of Realtors

American Farm Bureau Federation

CC: Chairman Hoeven, Senate Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee for Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration and Related Agencies

CC: Ranking Member Shaheen, Senate Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee for Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration and Related Agencies

CC: Chairman Harris, House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee for Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration and Related Agencies

CC: Ranking Member Bishop, House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee for Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration and Related Agencies