

Senator Torrey Westrom
Chair, Agriculture and Rural Development Finance and Policy
Minnesota Senate Building, Room 1150
Saint Paul, MN 55155



Representative Mike Sundin
Chair, Agriculture Finance and Policy
417 State Office Building
Saint Paul, MN 55155

April 30, 2021

Dear Chairs Westrom and Sundin,

On behalf of our more than 70 members, the Minnesota Rural Broadband Coalition asks that you fully fund the Border-to-Border Broadband Grant Program with \$120 million over the next two years. Our state grant program has a 7-year history of investing in Minnesota communities with no access to broadband. The Office of Broadband Development receives more applicants than it has available funds every year. However, the program has no funding for the upcoming biennium.

Federal investments in Minnesota are not certain and should not deter the Legislature from investing in our own grant program. The FCC's Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) program will not likely complete its review of applications before the end of the 2021 legislative session. Additionally, several Minnesota ISPs and organizations have raised concerns about the FCC's process and preliminary awards. If the state does not invest in the grant program in this budget, rural Minnesotans could wait up to six years to receive service through the RDOF program.

The Coalition remains concerned about the policy provisions in the omnibus bill, specifically adding the term "fixed wireless" to the statutory broadband definitions. Coverage areas for fixed wireless could be overreported to the state. Homes, farms, and businesses within range of a fixed wireless tower but without a line-of-sight connection could be incorrectly considered served or underserved. These communities would then be ineligible to receive a grant from the state grant program.

The state's broadband grant program works, and it has a track record of success. The Coalition strongly believes that removing policy provisions and fully funding \$120 million is the best path forward to meeting our statutory speed goals.

Respectfully yours,

Jay Trusty
Chair
Minnesota Rural Broadband Coalition

Minnesota Rural Broadband Coalition Members

Arrowhead Health
 Arrowhead Regional Development Commission
 Association of Minnesota Counties
 Barbara Dröher
 Chisago County HRA/EDA
 Citizens Utility Board of Minnesota
 City of Winthrop
 Clay County
 Cloquet Valley Internet Initiative
 Coalition of Greater Minnesota Cities
 CoBank
 Community of Minnesota Resorts
 Community Technology Advisors Corp
 Consolidated Telephone Company
 Cooperative Lights
 Cooperative Network
 Cooperative Network Services
 Development Services, Inc.
 East Central MN Educational Cable Cooperative
 East Central Regional Development Commission
 Economic Development Association of Minnesota
 EssentiaHealth
 Federated Rural Electric
 Finley Engineering
 Fond du Lac Tribal Communications

GPS 45:93
 Great River Energy
 Greater Minnesota Partnership
 Growth and Justice
 Hay Creek Township
 Headwaters Regional Development Commission
 Hiawatha Broadband Communications
 IMPACT 20/20
 Institute for Local SelfReliance
 Iron Range Economic Alliance
 Isanti County
 ISD 317 Deer River
 Jody Kramer, CPA
 Kanabec County EDA
 Kandiyohi County Economic Development
 League of Minnesota Cities
 Leech Lake Tribal Telecommunications
 Le Sueur County Broadband Coalition
 Lincoln County EDC
 Meeker Cooperative
 Meeker County EDA
 MidMinnesota Development Commission
 MiEnergy Cooperative
 Mille Lacs Energy Cooperative
 Minnesota Association of Professional County Economic Developers

Minnesota Association of Small Cities
 Minnesota Association of Townships
 Minnesota Corn Growers Association
 Minnesota Farm Bureau
 Minnesota Farmers Union
 Minnesota Library Association
 Minnesota Municipal Utilities Association
 Minnesota Public Broadband Alliance
 Minnesota Rural Education Association
 Minnesota Rural Electric Association
 Minnesota Soybean Growers Association
 MN Association of Community Telecommunications and Administrators
 MN River Valley Education District
 MN Rural Counties Caucus
 MN Telecom Alliance
 MVTV Wireless
 Neighborhood National Bank
 Nemadji Research Corporation
 Nobles County Economic Opportunity Network
 North Region Health Alliance
 North Star Township
 Northeast Service Cooperative

Northland Foundation
 Northwest Minnesota Foundation
 NW Regional Development Commission
 PCs for People
 Project FINE
 Range Association of Municipalities and Schools
 Redwing Ignite
 Redwood County
 Region 5 Regional Development Commission
 Region Nine Development Commission
 Schools for Equity in Education
 Sherburne County EDA
 Sourcewell
 Southern Minnesota Beet Sugar Cooperative
 Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation
 Southwest Initiative Foundation
 Southwest Regional Development Commission
 SPIRE Credit Union
 Treacy Information Services
 Turtle Island Communications
 Upper Minnesota Valley Regional Development Commission
 West Central Initiative
 Winthrop EDA

