

December 11, 2020

Senator Ted Kaufman
Co-Chair, Biden-Harris Transition

Mr. John Williams
Team Lead, Federal Communications Commission Agency Review Team

Office of the President-Elect Joseph R. Biden Jr.
Herbert C. Hoover Building
1401 Constitution Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Senator Kaufman, Dear Mr. Williams,

Over the last year, rural Vermont much like rural America has been hit hard by this pandemic. While our small rural state has much to be proud of in terms of the collective sacrifice of our communities in remaining socially distant and abiding by public health guidelines, these measures have most greatly impacted communities lacking proper access to broadband.

There are countless communities where shifts to remote learning have left children unable to properly connect with educators and support service providers, isolated older Vermonters unable to access telemedicine or family members, employees unable to access remote work, and citizens unable to participate in our democracy at the local, county and statewide level. We recognize this is not just the story of rural Vermont, but also of rural America.

Simply put, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown us what rural Vermonters and Americans have always known: that universal access to quality broadband is essential for the health and well-being of our communities. Broadband is the electricity of our time and to imagine homes without it, is akin to imagining homes without heat or water.

Long before this pandemic, however, inadequate broadband access impacted our rural economy. According to the Vermont Department of Public Service, roughly 23% of Vermont, comprising 68,000 homes and businesses, have not had adequate access to broadband. Vermont is one of the oldest states in the country, with more deaths than births in a majority of counties. Vermont's population and workforce continue to decline, and despite robust efforts to attract remote workers, absent adequate broadband, these efforts have not realized their full potential.

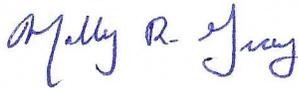
Earlier this year, using funding available through the CARES Act, the Vermont legislature passed H.966 to make needed emergency investments in Vermont's telecommunications infrastructure. Unfortunately, the appropriation only met a fraction of the roughly \$293 million needed to close Vermont's broadband gap. As written in the bill, "With haste and precision, the State must redouble its efforts to go where the market will not."

As the Biden-Harris Administration has stated so clearly in the “Plan to Build Back Better in Rural America” adequate access to broadband “should be a great economic equalizer for rural America, not another economic disadvantage, just like rural electrification several generations ago.”

With federal support, Vermont can continue to deploy emergency connectivity and expand permanent access so that we recover stronger from this pandemic.

I know I speak for so many Vermonters in applauding the incoming Administration’s recognition that “high-speed broadband is essential in the 21st Century economy”. I would welcome any opportunity to discuss the work underway in Vermont, and yet to be done, in closing the broadband gap in our rural communities.

Sincerely,



Molly R. Gray
Lieutenant Governor-Elect
State of Vermont

Cc:

Senator Patrick Leahy
Senator Bernie Sanders
Representative Peter Welch