

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

Chairman Sanford Bishop
Appropriations Subcommittee on
Agriculture, Rural Development,
FDA, and Related Agencies
H-307, The Capitol

Ranking Member Jeff Fortenberry
Appropriations Subcommittee on
Agriculture, Rural Development,
FDA, and Related Agencies
1016 Longworth House Office Building

April 4, 2019

Dear Chairman Bishop and Ranking Member Fortenberry,

As you consider Fiscal Year 2020 appropriations, we write to you to request \$550 million for USDA's ReConnect Program and \$350 million for the rural broadband loan and grant program authorized by the *Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018*.

Affordable broadband access is critical for the economic development of rural communities, enabling them to fully participate in the internet-based economy. It enables farmers to use precision agriculture techniques, patients to access medical care remotely via telemedicine, children to conduct research for school projects, and businesses to engage with customers. Yet, according to the FCC's 2018 Broadband Deployment Report, more than 30% of Americans in rural areas lack access to fixed terrestrial broadband at speeds of 25 Mbps/3 Mbps, compared to only 2% of Americans in urban areas.

In FY2018 and FY2019, Congress appropriated \$600 million and \$550 million, respectively, for a pilot broadband loan and grant program. This program was launched in December 2018 by USDA as the ReConnect Rural Broadband Program, and addresses one of the core recommendations of President Trump's Interagency Task Force on Agriculture and Rural Prosperity. In the *Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018*, better known as the 2018 Farm Bill, Congress authorized \$350 million per year for a broadband loan and grant program. **We are requesting funding for both of these programs: \$550 million for the ReConnect Program and \$350 million for the broadband loan and grant program authorized by the *Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018*.**

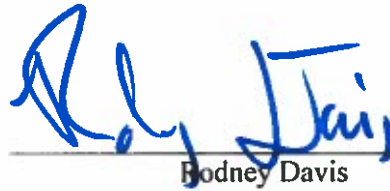
These programs play a role in meeting the goal of broadband access for all Americans, and therefore we request that the ReConnect Program receive level funding at the FY2019 level and the Farm Bill-authorized program receive funding at the authorized amount. We believe that support for these programs is critical to address the "digital divide" and ensure that our rural communities have equal access to opportunity.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

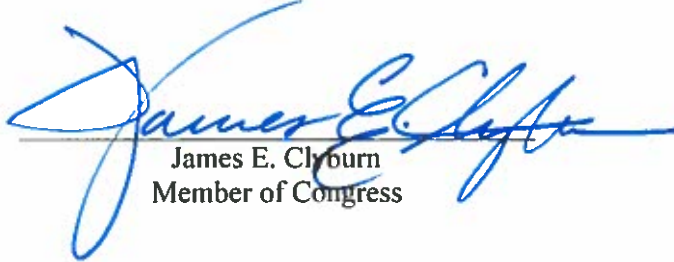
Sincerely,



Abigail D. Spanberger
Member of Congress



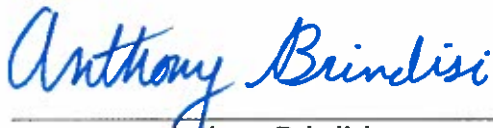
Rodney Davis
Member of Congress



James E. Clyburn
Member of Congress



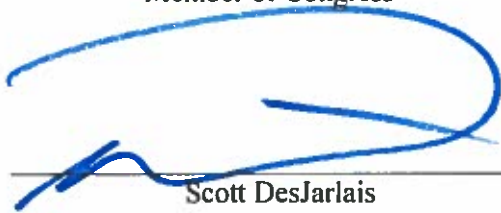
Filemon Vela
Member of Congress



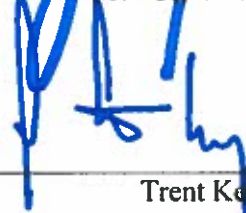
Anthony Brindisi
Member of Congress



Jimmy Panetta
Member of Congress



Scott DesJarlais
Member of Congress



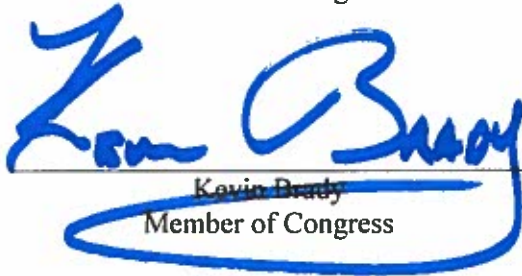
Trent Kelly
Member of Congress



Cedric L. Richmond
Member of Congress



Tom O'Halleran
Member of Congress



Kevin Brady
Member of Congress



Jeff Van Drew
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Tulsi Gabbard
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Mike Thompson
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Antonio Delgado
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Ben Ray Lujan
Member of Congress



Ralph Abraham, M.D.
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Ron Kind
Member of Congress



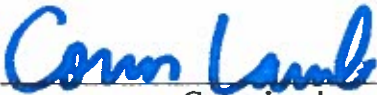
Jennifer Wexton
Member of Congress



Anna G. Eshoo
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Chrissy Houlahan
Member of Congress



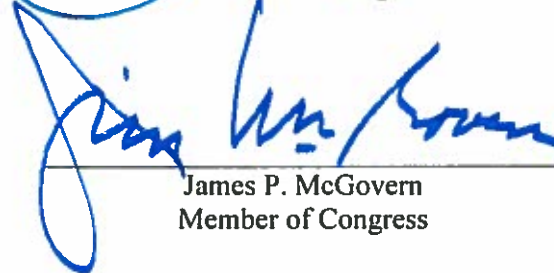
Conor Lamb
Member of Congress



Emanuel Cleaver, II
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TJ Cox
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James P. McGovern
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Lance Gooden
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A. Donald McEachin
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Rick W. Allen

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Cynthia Axne

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Alma S. Adams, Ph.D.
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Kendra S. Horn

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Elise M. Stefanik
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Kelly Armstrong
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Brian Fitzpatrick
Member of Congress



Dusty Johnson
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John Katko
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Kim Schrier, M.D.
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Chris Pappas
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Ruben Gallego
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Joseph P. Kennedy, III
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Steve Watkins
Member of Congress



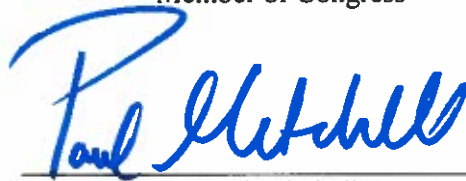
Stephanie Murphy
Member of Congress



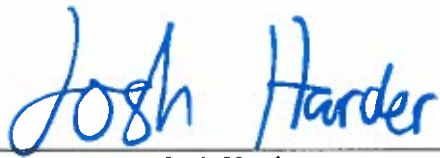
Kathleen M. Rice
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Susie Lee
Member of Congress



Paul Mitchell
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Josh Harder
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Dave Loebsack
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