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May 4, 2020

Chad Rupe, Administrator
USDA Rural Development
Rural Utilities Service
1400 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20250-1510

Dear Administrator Rupe:

Thank you for your commitment to expand broadband service to our nation's rural areas through the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) ReConnect Program. As our nation continues the fight against the 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, I commend USDA's decision to utilize the \$100 million appropriated by Congress in the CARES Act to prioritize funding for 100% grant projects deemed ineligible in the first round of ReConnect Program funding.

As you know, millions of Americans across the country have become reliant on broadband to perform the functions of everyday life. From telemedicine to livestreaming religious services, internet connectivity has become many Americans' lifeline to the outside world and key to maintaining their jobs, education and health. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the disadvantages many of our rural North Carolinians face from a lack of accessible and affordable broadband services.

As North Carolina and the rest of our nation continues the fight against COVID-19, I respectfully request that the Rural Utilities Service (RUS) expedite the approval process for funding awards for the ReConnect program. Now, more than ever, it is clear that broadband internet access is a necessity. As such, I urge USDA to build on the ReConnect program's success by ensuring that eligible service providers have access to this critical funding as soon as possible.

Respectfully,



Thom Tillis
U.S. Senator

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