

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 25, 2019

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue,

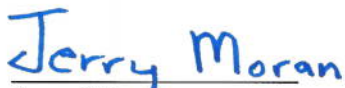
We commend the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Rural Utilities Service (RUS) for its continued commitment to provide federal funds for the cost of construction, improvement, or acquisition of facilities and equipment delivering high-speed broadband access to eligible areas, particularly rural homes, farms, ranches, schools, and health care facilities. Specifically, the Rural eConnectivity Pilot Program (ReConnect Program) recently completed its application window for the first round of funding on July 12, 2019, and while this critical program is poised to have a significant impact on closing the "Digital Divide," there are lessons to be learned from the initial administration of this program.


Funds from the first application window are already being disbursed, which is why it is necessary and time-sensitive for RUS to focus on specific components of the application process that can be improved in an effort to effectively allocate federal resources to unserved communities in a fiscally responsible manner. As the agency considers rules pertaining to the application process for future funding windows of the ReConnect Program, one such consideration for improvement should be the facilitation of applicants of all types and sizes while removing any unintentional administrative barriers to participate.

Attracting applicants to participate in the ReConnect Program will improve the cost-effectiveness and quality of the broadband service supported by the program and expand the reach of federal support to the widest range of eligible projects. We urge RUS to effectively utilize the rulemaking process to refine the application requirements, while consulting with stakeholders, to eliminate any unnecessary and burdensome barriers that would prevent full participation in the program.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter and for your commitment to ensure rural Americans have affordable and reliable broadband services.

Sincerely,


Jerry Moran
United States Senator


John Thune
United States Senator

Deb Fischer

Deb Fischer
United States Senator

Thom Tillis

Thom Tillis
United States Senator

Bill Cassidy, M.D.

Bill Cassidy
United States Senator

John Boozman

John Boozman
United States Senator

Steve Daines

Steve Daines
United States Senator