



*State of North Carolina
Office of the Governor*

*Roy Cooper
Governor*

May 17, 2019

*20301 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, N. C. 27699-0301*

Mr. Sonny Perdue, Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

RE: USDA Reconnect Grant-Rural Broadband
Ellerbe Telephone Company

Dear Secretary Perdue:

This letter is to offer my unconditional support to the ReConnect Grant Application filed by Ellerbe Telephone Company dba RiverStreet Networks (a subsidiary of Wilkes Telephone Membership Corporation, which provides service in rural areas of Richmond County, North Carolina). This specific grant would enable RiverStreet to provide fiber based broadband service to approximately 436 currently underserved customers in three disparate rural areas of the Ellerbe exchange in rural Richmond County, NC. The Green Lake area southeast of Ellerbe has 100 potential customers. The area along Hwy 73 West has 145 potential customers. The third area encompasses the Towns of Norman and Wind Blow and has approximately 191 potential customers. The Fiber-To-The-Premise (FTTP) network will be capable of symmetrical broadband services of up to 1Gbps.

North Carolina has a dedicated Broadband Infrastructure Office within N.C. Department of Information Technology, which administers the State Broadband Plan that can be accessed at www.ncbroadband.gov. In 2018, the North Carolina General Assembly enacted the Growing Rural Economies with Access to Technology Act (GREAT Act), which provides matching state grants to encourage rural broadband deployment. North Carolina law also permits public utilities in North Carolina to provide broadband services, and a bill is currently before the General Assembly that would also authorize Electric Membership Corporations to seek federal grants to deploy broadband infrastructure. In 2018, the General Assembly established an expedited process for small cell site permitting, the Department of Transportation, which manages 80 percent of the

Secretary Sonny Perdue
May 17, 2019
Page 2

rights-of-ways along our roadways has established an online permitting approval process to expedite utility construction, and further streamlining of the permitting processes has been discussed in the current 2019 session.

Broadband is essential to a high quality of life and economic opportunity for rural communities. We appreciate the commitment of the USDA to this effort and I pledge the continuing support of my administration to a similar effort at the State level.

With kind regards, I am

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Roy Cooper". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "R" and "C".

Roy Cooper

RAC/sm