



*State of North Carolina
Office of the Governor*

*Roy Cooper
Governor*

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

May 17, 2019

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

RE: USDA Reconnect Grant-Rural Broadband
 Service Telephone

Dear Secretary Perdue:

This letter is to offer my unconditional support to the ReConnect Grant Application filed by Service Telephone Company dba RiverStreet Networks (a subsidiary of Wilkes Telephone Membership Corporation, which provides service in rural areas of Columbus County, North Carolina). This specific grant would enable Service to provide fiber based broadband service to approximately 1,317 currently underserved customers south of Fair Bluff, NC. While the area is largely agricultural and residential, the project will also provide high-speed Internet service to the local volunteer fire department for the first time. The Fiber-To-The-Premise (FTTP) network will be capable of symmetrical broadband services of up to 1Gbps. This area has been devastated by Hurricane Michael in 2016 and Hurricane Florence in 2018 and is in dire need of assistance.

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

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cell site permitting, the Department of Transportation, which manages 80 percent of the 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, slightly slanted style.

Roy Cooper

RAC/sm