



*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
Star Telephone Membership Corporation

Dear Secretary Perdue:

This letter is to offer my unconditional support to the Application filed by Star Telephone Membership Corporation (STAR TMC) for a grant to provide rural broadband service. STAR TMC provides telecommunications services, including broadband service, in parts of five rural counties in eastern North Carolina. STAR TMC serves the most rural of rural areas in North Carolina, covering 1,458 square miles with three customers per route mile. This specific grant would enable STAR TMC to provide broadband service to rural portions devastated during Hurricane Matthew and Florence. These areas include Herring, Six Runs, Harrells and Kelly. Collectively these areas serve over 5,000 homes and businesses in eastern Bladen and Sampson counties. The proposal would provide access to approximately 3,700 homes and businesses, as well as providing access to anchor institutions, such as medical facilities, libraries, educational facilities and electrical substations. The plan would also increase economic opportunity and facilitate agricultural production and marketing. When complete, the facilities will provide fiber optic access to the customer premises that will enable the provision gigabyte capable service.

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 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

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permits public utilities in North Carolina to provide broadband services, and a bill is currently before the General Assembly would 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 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 during the current 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, flowing style.

Roy Cooper

RAC/sm