

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 22, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20501

Dear Secretary Perdue,

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is having a disproportionate impact on rural America, further stretching what is already limited resources in rural and native communities across the country. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced people to work from home, students to learn from home, and people to access healthcare from home. The COVID-19 pandemic has proven that broadband isn't just nice, it is necessary for our nation's economy to work for everyone.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, rural and native communities were already facing a broadband gap. According to the FCC's 2019 Broadband Deployment Report, over 25% of rural Americans are without access to fixed terrestrial broadband at quality speeds, compared to only 1.7% of Americans living in an urban environment. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted these broadband deficiencies as Americans are forced to stay home to work and go to school.

The USDA ReConnect program was specifically designed to address rural and urban internet inequities, by equipping rural America with grants and loans to facilitate and fund construction of new broadband infrastructure. Recognizing the need for broadband access in rural communities, Congress appropriated an additional \$100 million under The CARES Act for the ReConnect Program. However, the USDA has only obligated a small fraction of this money. These funds are desperately needed, and it is unacceptable that this money is still unspent.

We ask that you listen to the needs of millions of Americans living in rural communities across the country, expedite the spending of ReConnect program dollars, and prioritize improved broadband access.

Sincerely,



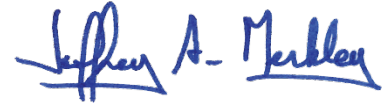
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United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Doug Jones
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

/s/ Robert P. Casey, Jr.
Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator



Kyrsten Sinema
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator