

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 13, 2026

The Honorable Andy Harris  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development,  
Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies  
2362-A Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Sanford Bishop, Jr.  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development,  
Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies  
1036 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Harris and Ranking Member Bishop:

As you consider Fiscal Year 2027 (FY27) appropriations, we respectfully request that the Committee include robust funding for broadband programs at the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Affordable and reliable broadband access is critical for the economic development of rural communities, enabling them to fully participate in today's internet-based economy. A robust internet connection allows our students to access the educational tools they need, patients to access medical care through telemedicine, and our farmers to best apply precision agriculture techniques. More than ever, access to high-speed internet is critical to rural economic development, as many businesses and families are choosing to locate elsewhere if this type of connection is unavailable.

Congress has recognized the ongoing disparity between rural and urban communities' access to reliable internet service and has provided significant funding in recent years to close the digital divide, with the goal of connecting every rural home and family with reliable broadband service. This is a welcome and much-needed investment, especially in low-density, hard-to-reach areas that are difficult and expensive to serve, but it's clear that continued assistance is needed.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has and will continue to play a key role in connecting rural communities with the tools and resources they need to thrive. For many rural communities, USDA has been a longtime, trusted partner for rural economic development opportunities, in large part because of the unique focus USDA has on helping smaller communities. With that viewpoint, the agency understands the unique challenges small communities face in accessing and implementing federal programs and funding opportunities, and the unique costs associated with building infrastructure in these areas.

In 2018, Congress created the USDA ReConnect program, which has provided loans and grants for the construction of rural broadband infrastructure. Across several funding cycles, USDA has reported strong demand for the ReConnect program, with the agency receiving requests for funding far outpacing the amounts that Congress has made available. Despite the overwhelming demand for support through the program, the most recent package appropriated just over \$50 million for ReConnect, which is the smallest amount of funding to be provided to the program since its launch.

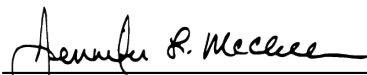
Other programs, such as the USDA Community Connect Program, have offered funding annually to community-oriented broadband programs that foster economic growth in economically challenged communities where broadband service does not currently exist.

As you begin to draft the FY27 bill, we respectfully ask that you consider updating the broadband program eligibility requirements to align with the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) increased fixed speed benchmark, which was updated in 2024 from 25/3 megabits per second (Mbps) to 100/20 Mbps. Amending this eligibility requirement would provide consistency across federal broadband programs. We also encourage prioritizing a minimum build to a standard of 100/100 Mbps in the ReConnect program, which recognizes rapidly growing consumer and business bandwidth needs and ensures that taxpayer dollars are used to build lasting and scalable broadband networks.

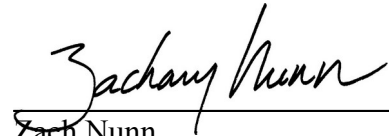
The U.S Department of Agriculture continues to be a trusted and well-known partner for rural communities. Further investments in its successful rural broadband loan and grant programs will provide meaningful assistance for rural communities and their economies at a time when it's most needed. Therefore, we respectfully request robust funding for USDA's rural broadband programs, including ReConnect, Community Connect, and Middle Mile. We believe that continued support for rural broadband through USDA is critical to address the digital divide and ensure that rural communities have equal access to opportunity.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



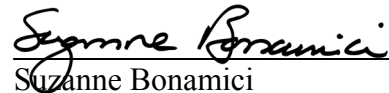
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Jennifer L. McClellan  
Member of Congress



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Zach Nunn  
Member of Congress



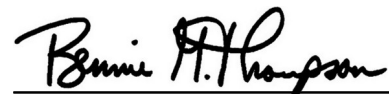
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Lizzie Fletcher  
Member of Congress



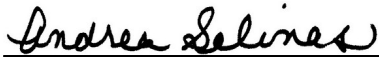
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Suzanne Bonamici  
Member of Congress



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Darren Soto  
Member of Congress



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Bennie G. Thompson  
Member of Congress



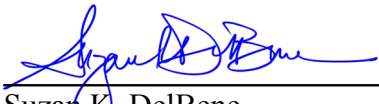
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Andrea Salinas  
Member of Congress



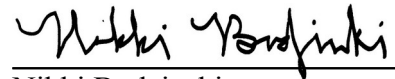
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Donald G. Davis  
Member of Congress



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Suzan K. DelBene  
Member of Congress



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Nikki Budzinski  
Member of Congress



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Chrissy Houlahan  
Member of Congress



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Richard E. Neal  
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Rick Larsen  
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Marilyn Strickland  
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Paul D. Tonko  
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Brad Finstad  
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Suhas Subramanyam  
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Gabe Vasquez  
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Dusty Johnson  
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Jared Huffman  
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David Scott  
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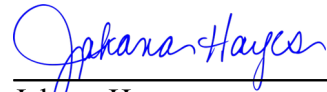
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Joe Neguse  
Member of Congress



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Sam Graves  
Member of Congress



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Jahana Hayes  
Member of Congress



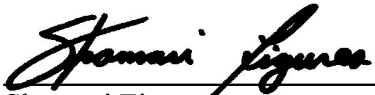
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Jim Costa  
Member of Congress



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Rob Bresnahan, Jr.  
Member of Congress



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Shomari Figures  
Member of Congress



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Eric Sorensen  
Member of Congress



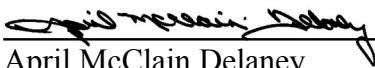
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Mark DeSaulnier  
Member of Congress



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Raja Krishnamoorthi  
Member of Congress



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April McClain Delaney  
Member of Congress



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Josh Riley  
Member of Congress



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Janelle S. Bynum  
Member of Congress



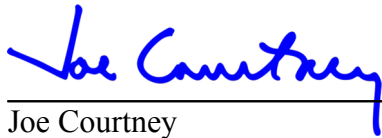
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Terri A. Sewell  
Member of Congress



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Angie Craig  
Member of Congress



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Joe Courtney  
Member of Congress



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James P. McGovern  
Member of Congress



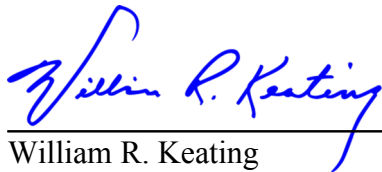
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Mike Thompson  
Member of Congress



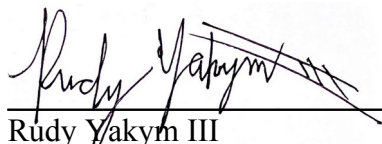
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Kat Cammack  
Member of Congress



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William R. Keating  
Member of Congress



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Rudy Yakym III  
Member of Congress



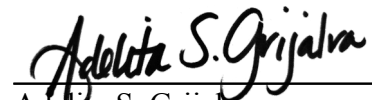
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Robin L. Kelly  
Member of Congress



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Troy A. Carter, Sr.  
Member of Congress



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Adelta S. Grijalva  
Member of Congress



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Mike Bost  
Member of Congress



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Kim Schrier, M.D.  
Member of Congress



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Shontel M. Brown  
Member of Congress



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Sharice L. Davids  
Member of Congress



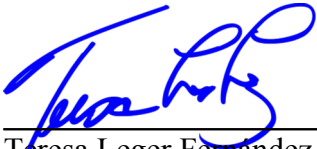
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Pablo José Hernández  
Member of Congress



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Pete Stauber  
Member of Congress



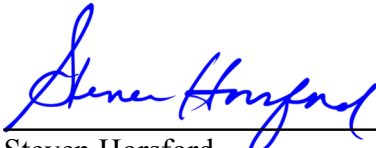
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Teresa Leger Fernández  
Member of Congress



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Darin LaHood  
Member of Congress



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Steven Horsford  
Member of Congress