

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

February 4, 2022

The Honorable Alan Davidson
Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Communications and Information
National Telecommunications and Information Administration
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20230

Re: Docket No. NTIA–2021–0002

Dear Assistant Secretary Davidson:

I write to you regarding the National Telecommunications and Information Administration’s (NTIA) request for comment about the implementation of the broadband provisions included in the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

Broadband is critical infrastructure for the 21st century. Individual constituents, small businesses and family farmers across Minnesota’s Second Congressional District rely on access to high-speed and affordable broadband to make a living, pursue education and participate in society. As NTIA implements the historic \$65 billion investment in broadband investment that Congress passed in 2021, I urge you to prioritize the comments that you receive from individuals on the ground in communities across Minnesota and the country. Small business owners, education and healthcare leaders and local elected officials have important perspectives to share as you develop and implement programs and ensure that this historic investment makes an immediate and transformative impact.

For example, Goodhue County (MN) Commissioner Linda Flanders has been working hard to ensure that the unserved and underserved areas of Goodhue County—which together cover more than half of the county—benefit from these dollars. As Commissioner Flanders notes in the comment she submitted to NTIA:

“Over the past two years, as the pandemic has forced people to stay home, myself and other Commissioners have heard from many constituents about their frustrations and inequities regarding high speed Internet: Students have had to be driven to local hot spots to get homework assignments or attend distance learning... Independent business owners who discovered a way to work from home, found they could not because of unstable Internet. Teachers, with children at home, could not teach class nor attend class because service was not sufficient for more than 1 computer... Township officers could not attend County meetings (from home) because of lack of Internet service. Telemedicine appointments were not accessible to many due to lack of internet service speeds. Since rural areas are shrinking, to be competitive in a global market, high speed internet is imperative...”

And the University of Minnesota's Dr. Carrie Henning-Smith, who serves on my Rural Health Care Advisory Council, put it well when she shared the following in a recent meeting:

"Investment in broadband and telehealth will strengthen the vitality of rural communities, which experience disparities in access to care and in population health outcomes. Beyond health care, however, these investments will expand opportunities in education, employment, social connections, and livability of all communities."

Furthermore, local providers know what solutions do and don't make a difference and how important having accurate broadband maps is for making wise investments. For example, the Minnesota Public Broadband Alliance (MPBA)—which is a collection of non-profit providers who own and/or operate broadband networks that have some level of public funding—shared this note in their comments:

"There is a critical need for universal, accurate mapping of service areas. The current data maps that are available are self-reported by providers by census block. If one resident is served in that census block, the providers can indicate they serve the entire census block which is often not true especially in rural parts of the country. The reports are often over reported in service and reported download and upload speeds."

Local leaders like Commissioner Flanders and Dr. Henning Smith and local broadband providers like those that make up the MPBA are key partners in our collective effort to ensure every American has access to high speed and affordable broadband internet. When I voted to pass the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, I did so knowing that it would make a transformative impact for constituents across Minnesota's Second Congressional District.

I appreciate your work to ensure that this historic investment in broadband makes an immediate and positive impact in my district and across the country. I am confident that local leaders in my district will provide valuable input to NTIA as it implements the broadband programs that Congress funded in the IIJA. And I stand ready to partner with NTIA and local leaders on future broadband expansion efforts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Angie Craig". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Angie" and last name "Craig" clearly distinguishable.

Angie Craig
Member of Congress