



PO BOX 201706
Helena, MT 59620-1706
(406) 444-3064
FAX (406) 444-3036

Economic Affairs Interim Committee
66th Montana Legislature

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Feb. 20, 2020

Charles Robison
State Director, Montana State Office
United States Department of Agriculture Rural Development
2229 Boot Hill Court
Bozeman MT 59715

Dear Mr. Robison:

The Economic Affairs Interim Committee has heard from legislative constituents this year about the need for greater broadband access and better telecommunications affordability in Montana. Recognizing that the Montana Legislature already has adopted a policy that encourages "universal availability of basic telecommunications service at affordable rates" (see 69-3-802, MCA), the Economic Affairs Interim Committee, a legislative committee, wishes to express further support specific to broadband, in particular for telecommunications companies serving Montana households that apply for USDA ReConnect grants. The committee currently is discussing additional ways that the Legislature can support broadband expansion.

The Governor has said that a [document](#) released in December 2015 by the Main Street Project's Broadband Key Industry Network (KIN) lays out the state's broadband plan. The plan calls for broadband mapping, increased funding, removal of barriers, such as permitting delays, and development of a broadband advisory group. The Economic Affairs Interim Committee is addressing ongoing issues related to these objectives.

Echoing the Governor's letter to you from April 1, 2019, the Economic Affairs Interim Committee believes that applicants for USDA ReConnect grants ought to receive State Broadband Activity priority points based not only on Montana's past efforts but on the legislature's continued interest in improving state policy related to broadband.

Thank you for your consideration of Montana applicants for USDA ReConnect grants. Expansion of broadband access in Montana benefits not just this state's citizens but all Americans who visit Montana, work here, or interact with Montanans.

Sincerely,

Rep. Sharon Stewart Peregoy
EAIC Presiding Officer

Rep. Vince Ricci
EAIC Vice Presiding Officer

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