

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

November 4, 2019

The Honorable John Hoeven  
Chairman  
Committee on Appropriations,  
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural  
Development, Food and Drug  
Administration, and Related Agencies  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sanford Bishop, Jr.  
Chairman  
Committee on Appropriations,  
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural  
Development, Food and Drug  
Administration, and Related Agencies  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jeff Merkley  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Appropriations,  
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural  
Development, Food and Drug  
Administration, and Related Agencies  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jeff Fortenberry  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Appropriations,  
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural  
Development, Food and Drug  
Administration, and Related Agencies  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Hoeven, Chairman Bishop, Ranking Member Merkley, and Ranking Member Fortenberry,

As the House and Senate continue to work on the Fiscal Year 2020 Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, I respectfully request your support for the Distance Learning and Telemedicine (DLT) Grant Program.

Access to a viable broadband connection impacts nearly every rural community in the nation. The United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Distance Learning and Telemedicine program helps rural communities leverage the unique capabilities of telecommunications to connect with each other and people around the world. This critical program helps Americans tap into tele-health technology, distance learning education, and internet-based agribusiness that farmers in rural America rely on to remain competitive.

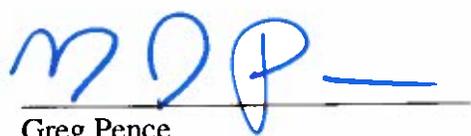
As you know, the 2018 Farm Bill authorized \$350 million for Rural Broadband Access Loans and Grants, including \$82 million for the Distance Learning and Telemedicine grant program. We are pleased that the House-passed funding bill, H.R. 3055, adopted an amendment to increased funding for this program from \$50,000,000 to \$75,000,000. Unfortunately, the Senate language only provides \$34,000,000 for this broadband program.

You may be interested to know that last year, USDA received a total of 181 applications for this grant program, with a total funding request of over \$58,000,000 million. In Fiscal Year 2019, 43% of funds from the Distance Learning and Telemedicine program were used to combat the opioid epidemic. With the ongoing opioid crisis hurting communities across America, now is not the time to cut corners when it comes to programs that address substance abuse.

As you can see, adoption of the Senate funding level would dramatically reduce the USDA's ability to administer both types of DLT grants – those aimed at extending quality education to address learning disparities across the country as well as those with the primary mission of addressing the opioid epidemic in rural America. Without access to broadband, entire communities are being left behind.

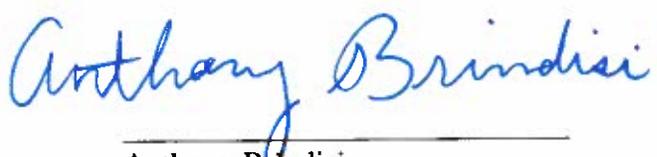
On behalf of rural communities across our nation, I thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,



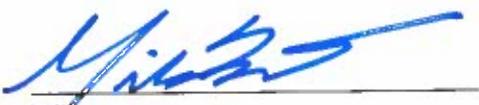
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Greg Pence  
Member of Congress



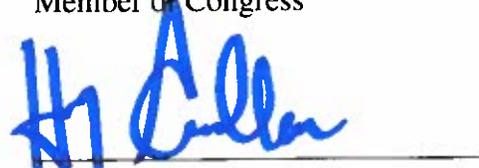
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Anthony Brindisi  
Member of Congress



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Mike Bost  
Member of Congress



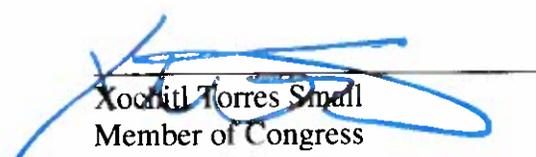
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Henry Cuellar  
Member of Congress



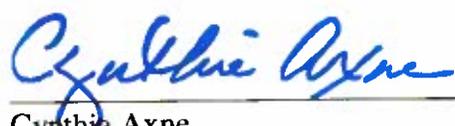
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Denver Riggleman  
Member of Congress



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Xochitl Torres Small  
Member of Congress



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Cynthia Axne  
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Mark Meadows  
Member of Congress

*Carol D. Miller*

Carol D. Miller  
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*Trent Kelly*

Trent Kelly  
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*William R. Keating*

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Pete Stauber  
Member of Congress



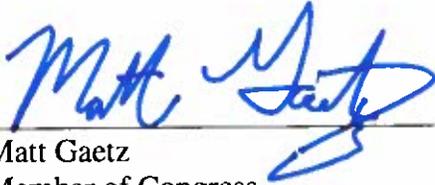
Austin Scott  
Member of Congress



Antonio Delgado  
Member of Congress



Troy Balderson  
Member of Congress



Matt Gaetz  
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Glenn Grothman  
Member of Congress



Jim Costa  
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Jim Banks  
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Abigail Spanberger  
Member of Congress