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April 22, 2020

The Honorable Bette Brand  
Deputy Under Secretary for Rural Development  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Under Secretary Brand:

I write to request full consideration of three Colorado applications for grant funding, detailed below, under Round 2 the U.S. Department of Agriculture's ReConnect Loan and Grant Program. All three projects are consistent with the ReConnect Program's goals and the Department's broader mission to close the digital divide and ensure economic opportunity for every American. These projects will meaningfully improve the lives of thousands of families in Colorado, spur economic growth and educational opportunity, and help our rural communities sustain their quality of life.

These projects are especially critical in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. When people must stay at home to protect themselves, their families, and their community, access to broadband is a vital lifeline. With that in mind, I urge a swift, comprehensive, and fair review of these ReConnect applications.

Please find additional details about each project below:

**Emery Telecommunications & Video, Inc.:** This is a grant request of \$6.3 million along with \$2.1 million in matching funds, for a total project cost of \$8.4 million. The project will provide approximately 400 Fiber to the Premises (FTTP) connections to homes and farms over 206.3 square miles. Emery proposes to serve areas north of US-491 in Colorado, including North Dolores County, South Dolores County, South San Miguel County, Egnar-North, East Dove Creek, and Lewis. Access to reliable, high-speed broadband is essential for continued economic growth in the area, with significant positive spillover effects for the community. Emery's proposal will build on the \$2.7 million grant they were awarded in Round 1.

**Delta-Montrose Electric Association (DMEA), Elevate:** This is a grant request for \$12.8 million along with \$4.3 million in matching funds, for a total project cost of \$17.1 million. This project will provide FTTP to 2,448 homes and farms, covering 175.1 sq. miles. DMEA proposes to deploy FTTP serving the greater Olathe and Delta Colorado farming communities with high speed broadband. Southwestern Colorado broadly is undergoing a period of economic transition, and broadband deployment is essential for sustaining the region's quality and way of life. Delta

County, in particular, has been hit hard by the closure of two coal mines. By connecting rural areas, including farmers and ranchers, to high-speed broadband, this project will allow individuals to deploy precision agriculture to optimize yields, participate in continuing education, receive telemedicine, and age in place. Moreover, it will help eliminate the homework gap between rural students and those in urban and suburban areas.

**Yampa Valley Electric Association (YVEA), Luminate:** This is a grant request of \$6 million plus \$2 million in matching funds, for a total project cost of \$8 million to deploy gigabit FTTP in three rural and remote areas. This project will provide FTTP to 264 homes and farms over 122 square miles. YVEA will manage the construction process serving Western Moffat County in the areas of Maybell and Sunbeam; Moffat County, in Hamilton; and South Routt and Eagle Counties in the areas of McCoy, Bond, and State Bridge. Many of the proposed service locations are rural farms and ranches, and community anchor locations such as post offices and community centers, which are located in the most extreme reaches of YVEA's service territory.

These projects align closely with the goals of the ReConnect program and the imperative to close Colorado's digital divide, and we strongly encourage a comprehensive and fair review. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,



Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator