MARK R. WARNER
VIRGINIA

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510–4606

COMMITTEES:
BANKING, HOUSING, AND URBAN AFFAIRS
COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION
BUDGET
RULES AND ADMINISTRATION

May 19, 2009

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Ms. Anna Gomez, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Communications and Information
National Telecommunications and Information Administration
U.S. Dept. of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20230

ACTION OFFICE Cyril
COPIES TO JW, MS, AS, D. Brown, S. Morris, L. Atlas, M Carey
SUSPENSE DATE
REMARKS
CONTROL# 0481

Dear Ms. Gomez:

As NTIA moves forward in its implementation of the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program ("BTOP"), I wanted to offer some advice based on my experience with broadband development efforts in Virginia. In 2006, I co-chaired the Virginia Broadband Roundtable, which was charged with accelerating the deployment of affordable broadband in the Commonwealth. The Roundtable created a statewide broadband availability map to help communities plan their broadband deployment efforts. It also developed a Community Tool-Kit that contained specific resources, such as a list of potential funding opportunities, to help communities at all stages of the planning process. Given how productive the Roundtable was, I offer the following advice as you structure your program.

1. **Provide consulting services to applicants who need it.** Not every community has experience with projects of this type, nor with federal grant applications. If such communities have access to expert, independent consultants who provide them with impartial advice to develop their project and application, it would improve the quality of their proposal and increase the likelihood that they would win a grant.

2. **Permit parties to submit grant applications on a rolling basis.** Granting applications on a rolling basis will prevent delays in disbursing funds to shovel-ready projects. It would also produce an initial round of successful grant applications that would serve as models for parties who are still preparing their grant proposal.

3. **Let states weigh in on how well a proposal addresses multiple community needs and leverages resources to promote competition and lower deployment costs.** Currently, applicants can apply to multiple federal programs for broadband-related funding. For example, a rural hospital may be able to apply to BTOP, the Department of Health and Human Services' healthcare IT stimulus program, and the Federal Communications Commission's Rural Health Care programs. This silo-driven approach encourages the deployment of an independent, single-source network into a community, rather than a system of networks that address multiple

community needs, leverage public-private partnerships, lower deployment costs and promote competition. A state should have the right to rank applications based on how well applications address these issues, and the NTIA should give significant weight to that state ranking, as appropriate, when deciding whether to award a BTOP grant.

4. **Create a cross-agency pilot program in which grant proposals from qualified states are evaluated and monitored based on the proposal's overall impact on the community.** For example, the NTIA and the Dept. of Health and Human Services could coordinate the review and oversight of a rural hospital's grant proposal for broadband access and health IT funding. Only grant applicants in states with a formal broadband program would qualify for the pilot program. NTIA could consider a number of factors to determine whether a state has a formal broadband program, such as whether the state has a statewide broadband availability map.

5. **Coordinate broadband mapping data collection efforts.** To prevent funding of duplicative efforts and promote collaboration across government and the private sector, it is imperative that the FCC and the NTIA coordinate their data collection efforts. One way to do this is to create a formal interagency committee. In addition, the NTIA should consider, in close consultation with stakeholders, how to craft reciprocal data sharing agreements that take into account important confidentiality concerns but also permit cooperation and data exchange between and among federal and state agencies.

Thank you for your consideration of my views. I look forward to working with you on this very important program.

Sincerely,

MARK R. WARNER
United States Senator