HANDOUT 2

Dear Senator Rapert, Representative Meeks, and other committee members,

Thank you for your interest in the Arkansas Rural Connect broadband grant program. As you know, the rules for Arkansas Rural Connect are currently online (see here: https://www.arkansasedc.com/docs/default-source/data-and-reports/doc101019-10102019145514.pdf?sfvrsn=9209b17d_0) and the public comment period for the rules is underway, so we welcome the opportunity to hear feedback on our work so far from legislators and the public. Feel free to call or email us next week or in the weeks following to learn more about the program. I will be present for the public hearings next week, as announced, on November 12th and 13th at 8:30-11 AM.

Arkansas Rural Connect is designed primarily to make progress towards the governor's goal, announced last May in the Arkansas State Broadband Plan, of making broadband available at speeds of at least 25 Mbps download, 3 Mbps upload in towns across Arkansas. It takes advantage of Act 912 of 2019, which allows governmental entities such as municipalities to apply for programs of grants and loans to deploy broadband. We will look to mayors of incorporated towns to represent the interests of their residents by working with internet service providers (ISPs) to develop projects that will satisfy the governor's goal in their towns, and then co-apply for grant funding. Mayors will then be asked to send us regular reports to confirm that ISPs are fulfilling their commitments.

We expect that with $25 million in funding, the Arkansas Rural Connect program will make major strides forward in connecting small town Arkansas to 21st-century broadband internet service. Broadband is becoming a necessity rather than a luxury, crucial for business development and job creation, education, health care, agriculture, shopping, and keeping in touch with friends and family. In fostering widespread broadband access, public policy faces a challenge similar to the 20th-century challenge of securing reliable and reasonably priced electricity and clean water for the population, including people living in outlying areas. Through Arkansas Rural Connect and other policies and strategies still under consideration, we aim to achieve the governor's broadband goal by 2022, and promoting rural broadband access for as many Arkansans as we can.

Regards,
Nathan Smith

Thank you for kind letter. It is my pleasure to respond. Thank you for kind letter. It is my pleasure to respond. Thank you for kind letter. It is my pleasure to respond. Thank you for kind letter. It is my pleasure to respond. Thank you for kind letter. It is my pleasure to respond. Thank you for kind letter. It is my pleasure to respond. Thank you for kind letter. It is my pleasure to respond. Thank you for kind letter