

ROBERT J. WITTMAN

1ST DISTRICT, VIRGINIA

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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

September 14, 2021

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Tamarah Holmes, Ph.D.
Director, Office of Broadband
Department of Housing and Community Development
600 East Main Street, Suite 300
Richmond, VA 23219

Dear Director Holmes:

I am writing in support of the Stafford County FY 2022 Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development Virginia Telecommunication Initiative (VATI) grant application to expand high-speed broadband availability in the First Congressional District through a partnership with Comcast. Approval of this application would help meet the critical need to buildout high-speed broadband service to residents of Stafford County.

Rural residents in Virginia's First Congressional District appreciate the value of high-speed broadband access. Providing reliable broadband access is vital for commercial stability, job creation, distance learning, and telehealth service expansion. Throughout the First Congressional District of Virginia, as in other largely rural areas, economic incentives are needed to expand broadband access, and the VATI program has been a successful vehicle of meeting that need. VATI encourages private telecommunications providers to enlarge their coverage and gives localities the ability to design the expansion that is right for their communities. This eases the financial burden associated with construction costs, broadens service, and creates a successful public-private partnership (P3) for the awardees and for the Commonwealth.

The western part of Stafford County is very rural and has unserved and underserved residents who also have spotty cell service. Deployment of broadband in these areas will provide enormous educational and economic development opportunities as well as access to online health options for the surrounding community. Additionally, as proven during the Coronavirus epidemic, access to high-speed internet is the key to equity in education for today's schoolchildren. It is part of the essential infrastructure for a modern community, particularly in Stafford County, a bedroom community of Washington, D.C., and home to many defense contractors as well as their employees and federal employees.

Thank you for your consideration of the Stafford County application. Moreover, if you have any concerns or questions, please do not hesitate to contact my office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert J. Wittman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent horizontal line across the middle of the name.

Robert J. Wittman
Member of Congress