

ROBERT J. WITTMAN

1ST DISTRICT, VIRGINIA



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September 18, 2020

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 Gloucester, Mathews, and Middlesex Counties FY 2021 Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development Virginia Telecommunication Initiative (VATI) grant application to expand high-speed broadband availability in the multiple counties in the First Congressional District of Virginia through a partnership with Open Broadband, LLC. Approval of this application would go a long way meeting the critical and mounting need to expand high-speed broadband in the above-mentioned counties.

Over the last several months, COVID-19 has changed the lives of Virginians in many ways. In an instant we went from classrooms to kitchen tables for learning and from offices to the local coffee shop for teleworking. We all depend on broadband connectivity for everyday tasks. Unfortunately, for many rural Virginians, the benefits of reliable broadband service are not realized. Rural residents in Virginia's First Congressional District appreciate the value of high-speed broadband access. Providing reliable broadband access is vital for job creation, distance learning, and increasing telehealth service. VATI encourages private telecommunications providers to enlarge their coverage and gives localities the ability to design the project and digital footprint that maximizes the benefits to their residents. This eases the financial burden associated with construction costs, expands service, and creates a successful public-private partnership (P3) for the awardees and for the Commonwealth.

Gloucester, Mathews, and Middlesex Counties have joined forces with Open Broadband to design a regional project that will make efficient use of the Commonwealth's VATI grant program funds. The neighboring counties listed in this letter are located on Virginia's Middle Peninsula along the Chesapeake Bay. These counties face a unique and dire need to expand broadband service and this project extends service to pockets of unserved parts scattered throughout the region. This grant application will provide access to 640 homes and businesses and the three counties along with Open Broadband are providing 53% of the project budget, which signifies the commitment these localities have to provide service to their residents.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this application. Moreover, if you have any questions or concerns, 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 long horizontal flourish at the end.

Robert J. Wittman
Member of Congress