

**ROBERT J. WITTMAN**  
1ST DISTRICT, VIRGINIA



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**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515**  
**September 1, 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 Essex 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 Atlantic Broadband. Approval of this application would help meet the critical need to buildout high-speed broadband service to residents of Essex 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.

Essex County has collaborated with Atlantic Broadband to utilize state grant funds to amplify local and private funding. This application is resourcefully designed and embodies a first-rate use of state resources with a high rate of private leverage. During the 2020 and 2021 school year 40% of Essex County Public School students did not have access to any internet access, and 70% did not have access to adequate broadband. Moreover, about 48% of households in Essex County can be designated as Low or Moderate income. This proposed application will increase educational opportunities and economic growth in the county.

Thank you for your consideration of the Essex 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 fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Robert J. Wittman  
Member of Congress