

The Honorable Janet Yellen
Secretary of the Treasury
U.S. Department of the Treasury
1500 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20220

June 15, 2021

Dear Secretary Yellen,

We are writing today regarding the recently issued Interim Final Rule from the Department of the Treasury for the Coronavirus State and Local Recovery Funds within the American Rescue Plan Act. Specifically, we support the guidance directing priority broadband investments to unserved or underserved areas, defined as those without access to wireline broadband connections capable of reliably delivering a minimum of 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload speeds (more commonly referred to as 25/3). We strongly encourage the Department to implement this rule in a manner that is targeted carefully to, and places a priority on, reaching those Americans who are truly lacking a broadband connection.

Access to the internet impacts all aspects of life today, including agriculture and other rural sectors of the economy. Unfortunately, many rural communities across our country continue to struggle with limited or no broadband access. As a result, these farmers, ranchers and local businesses cannot deploy the types of high-tech tools needed to compete in the global 21st century economy. At the same time, these barriers make it harder for young farmers to build their own operations and for disadvantaged farmers to access tools and resources designed to level the playing field.

Not only does this lead to decreased agricultural productivity and hold back local businesses, but it also impacts our families and neighbors, who may be forced to abandon a cherished rural lifestyle to pursue economic opportunities more available in cities and suburbs. We must protect the future success of our farmers, ranchers, small business owners and the communities they serve, by ensuring broadband access in every part of the country.

The focus of the Department's Interim Final Rule on those areas of the country that lack a 25/3 connection is a critical step toward making that objective a reality. Not adhering closely to the 25/3 standard when distributing funds could divert government funding to more densely populated areas that already have access to broadband services. That doesn't mean that government-funded projects in eligible areas should be limited to delivering 25/3; rather, the rules should help ensure that we are not giving those who already have access a second helping before the truly unserved have even had one. By specifically defining unserved areas as those unable to deliver minimum speeds of 25/3 Mbps, the rule prioritizes areas that have historically been left behind. In other words, this rule gives rural farmers, ranchers, and the hardworking Americans who live in rural communities a chance to catch up and compete in today's economy. Through Department enforcement and careful adherence to the plain language of its rule setting 25/3 as the standard for where federal dollars should be directed, substantial progress can be made in closing the rural digital divide.

The Treasury has a significant opportunity to connect all Americans, including our farmers, ranchers and rural families quickly. We, the undersigned, look forward to working with the Department of the Treasury to ensure our rural communities can access the broadband services they need.

Sincerely,

Julie M. Broadway, President
American Horse Council

Niel Ritchie, Executive Director
League of Rural Voters

Chase Adams, Senior Director
American Sheep Industry Association

Betsy Huber, President
National Grange

Zach Cikanek, Executive Director
Connect The Future

Rudy Arredondo, President/CEO
National Latino Farmers & Ranchers Trade
Association

Todd Van Hoose, President & CEO
Farm Credit Council

Robert Mahaffey, Executive Director
Rural School and Community Trust

Patty Judge & Jeff Link, Co-Founders
Focus on Rural America



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