

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
Washington, DC 20515-2201

April 26, 2021

Honorable Chris McLean  
Acting Administrator  
Rural Utilities Service  
STOP 1510, Rm 4121-S  
1400 Independence Ave., SW  
Washington, DC 20250-1510

Subject: Docket (RUS-20-TELECOM-0023)

Dear Mr. McLean:

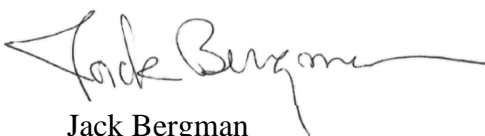
I write regarding the USDA Rural Utility Service's (RUS) request for comments on its February 26<sup>th</sup> Final Rule for the Rural eConnectivity Program, known as the ReConnect Program. In order to bring more broadband connectivity to Americans living in rural and remote areas, it is critical for RUS to operate this broadband infrastructure grant and loan program with a renewed commitment to efficiency and transparency.

The COVID-19 pandemic has steeply elevated the need to bridge our Nation's digital divide. Within the past year, nearly every American has experienced some aspect of their life suddenly forced into an online format. Given increased demand for functions like teleworking, online learning, and telehealth, the critical lack of connectivity in Northern Michigan and the Upper Peninsula has cost families and businesses in our region countless opportunities.

The ReConnect Program has directly benefitted Michigan's First Congressional District, where local providers have received funds to connect more households that were previously unserved or underserved. I applaud RUS' decision to reduce paperwork and shorten the application process for upcoming rounds of the program, a move which has the potential to assist the smaller providers directly invested in their communities. I recommend that RUS take additional steps to accommodate smaller internet service providers with more robust technical assistance to minimize frivolous application errors. Furthermore, RUS should use all available tools to promote transparency and timeliness during the application process to ensure applicants know where they stand and can have the certainty to continue serving their areas with or without ReConnect funding.

Thank you for your work to improve connectivity in our rural and remote communities through the ReConnect Program. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me or my staff should you have any questions about my comments.

Sincerely,



Jack Bergman  
Member of Congress

