

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 29, 2019

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

On December 13, 2018, I was proud to play a role in the Rural eConnectivity Pilot Program (ReConnect) announcement. Thank you for asking me to be a part of the launch of the new program; I look forward to its success. Under your leadership, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has worked to understand the true challenges facing rural communities and has been a strong partner in delivering solutions. The ReConnect program is a critical new tool that will help achieve our shared goal of prioritizing rural broadband and closing the digital divide.

Connectivity is essential for families, students, businesses, and communities to succeed. Without access to reliable and affordable high-speed internet, rural communities and rural states, like West Virginia, are being left behind when it comes to education, health care, job creation and retention, and overall economic potential. Through the ReConnect program, the USDA will make available approximately \$600 million in grants, loans, and loan grant combinations. The projects funded by these grants will help communities with fewer than 20,000 residents, like many communities in West Virginia, without broadband service or where services does not have sufficient broadband access, defined as 10 megabits per second (Mbps) downstream and 1 Mbps upstream.

As you know, on February 22, 2019 the USDA will finalize the application window for applicants to the ReConnect program. Unfortunately, due to the recent government shutdown, agencies have not been working at full capacity. For example, the USDA has only been able to conduct one of the seven webinars on the ReConnect program. Timely technical assistance webinars and workshops are imperative to informing potential applicants, especially for a new pilot program. As a result, I urge the USDA to extend all deadlines for ReConnect by one month. An extension will help ensure applicants are receiving the assistance they need and the awards are being given to projects that achieve the program's goals.

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Thank you for your commitment to this important program and the millions of rural Americans who will benefit from it. I appreciate the consideration of this request and look forward to working with you on this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Shelley Moore Capito". The signature is written in a cursive style with a distinct dot over the 'i' in "Capito".

Shelley Moore Capito

United States Senator