

June Tierney  
Commissioner  
Department of Public Service  
112 State Street  
Montpelier, VT 05620-2601

Re: Draft Emergency Broadband Action Plan

Dear Commissioner Tierney,

As the largest state-wide private, non-profit business organization representing nearly every sector of Vermont's economy, the Vermont Chamber of Commerce is proud to serve as a collective voice for thousands of businesses. The Vermont Chamber believes Vermont is well positioned to become a work-from-home capital, although realizing this goal will require universal broadband access. If implemented, the Department of Public Service (DPS) Emergency Broadband Action Plan (EBAP) would provide universal broadband access by 2024. The Vermont Chamber of Commerce fully supports the EBAP, as it would aid in economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, while also helping to strengthen Vermont's economic future.

We continue to believe universal broadband access is essential to maintaining a functional economy. This is especially true in our most rural communities, and the connectivity crisis prompted by COVID-19 has only magnified difficulties associated with operating a business or living with limited or no connectivity. Vermonters must have the ability to work, learn and access certain medical services remotely. These capabilities are now essential, and to meet current need in a timely manner we encourage policy leaders to embrace additional buildout in accordance with the federal standard while also working toward goals set forth in state law. This policy direction will allow thousands of unserved Vermonters to expeditiously gain access to critical infrastructure.

There exists considerable public debate related to varying ideas of what technology could most appropriately provide a lasting connectivity solution. We applaud this long-term thinking and support efforts to ensure any public funds invested in connectivity will serve Vermonters well into the future. That said, we are also fully cognizant of the reality currently facing workers unable telecommute, children unable to learn, and patients unable to access providers – tasks most often sufficiently covered through access to federally defined broadband. The EBAP addresses these immediate needs by requesting a statutory exception that would grant public

and private stakeholders the ability to expeditiously increase connectivity through a variety of technologies, preexisting and otherwise.

It is unrealistic to believe any single approach will deliver broadband to every Vermont home in a timely enough manner to address immediate emergency needs. The EBAP appropriately responds to this reality by encouraging collaboration designed to expeditiously mitigate the connectivity emergency, while also capitalizing on the availability of federal funds to provide a meaningful long-term investment for Vermonters. As outlined in the EBAP, efforts to expand connectivity must involve coordination between public and private stakeholders, each with their own valuable perspective and expertise.

The Vermont Chamber looks forward to serving as a resource to the Department as the EBAP is implemented. If you have any questions or foresee areas of collaboration that we may assist in, please contact Charles Martin at [cmartin@vtchamber.com](mailto:cmartin@vtchamber.com).

Sincerely,

Charles Martin  
Government Affairs Director