

Congress of the United States
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Small Business
2361 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-6515

MEMORANDUM

TO: Members of the Committee on Small Business

FROM: Committee Majority Staff

DATE: August 29, 2025

RE: Full Committee Hearing Titled: “Wired for Growth: How Expanding Broadband Can Revitalize Rural Small Businesses”

On **Wednesday, September 3, 2025, at 10:00 AM ET**, the Committee on Small Business will hold a hearing titled “**Wired for Growth: How Expanding Broadband Can Revitalize Rural Small Businesses.**” The meeting will convene in room 2360 of the Rayburn House Office Building. The purpose of this hearing is to examine how expanding reliable, affordable broadband can overcome barriers and unlock economic growth for rural small businesses.

I. Witnesses

- **Mr. Jimmy Todd**, CEO & General Manager, Nex-Tech
- **Ms. Kristi Westbrook**, CEO & General Manager, CTC
- **Mr. Jeff Vander Werff**, Owner, VWF, LLC
- **Ms. Karen Jackson-Furman**, CEO, West Kentucky & Tennessee Telecommunications Cooperative

II. Background

Rural small businesses face unique challenges accessing reliable, high-speed internet, which is increasingly essential for competing in the modern economy. Despite heavy federal and state investments, many rural communities remain unserved or underserved due to limited infrastructure, high costs, and disjointed efforts that slow deployment. Without adequate connectivity, small businesses struggle to fully participate in e-commerce, leverage remote work opportunities, or access critical online tools such as cloud-based services, virtual training, and telehealth. The result is lost growth opportunities, fewer small businesses in rural areas, and reduced economic vitality.

Over the past decade, the federal government has dedicated billions of taxpayer dollars to closing the digital gap through initiatives such as USDA’s ReConnect Program. However, the effectiveness of these efforts is often undermined by inaccurate or outdated broadband mapping

data.¹ Flawed coverage maps can mask the true extent of the problem, causing resources to be misdirected, duplicated, or wasted.² Many rural areas are left behind, not because of the lack of funding but because service gaps remain invisible to decision makers.

Closing this gap starts with better data. Accurate, transparent broadband availability information verified by communities is essential to effectively targeting resources. This requires improving federal mapping tools, holding internet service providers accountable for accurate reporting, and giving local governments and residents a stronger role in verifying service claims.

Equally important is the need to simplify and de-clutter the broadband funding ecosystem and develop a concise strategy that coordinates deployment efforts across federal agencies, state governments, the private sector, and community organizations. With clear, reliable data, policymakers can better align resources, reduce overlap, and maximize the impact of federal investments.³

III. Conclusion

Rural broadband is a cornerstone of rural small business success, enabling entrepreneurs to reach new markets, manage operations more efficiently, and compete on a level playing field with urban businesses. By investing in accurate mapping, coordinated deployment, and targeted funding, we can close the digital divide, spur job creation, and strengthen rural America's economic resilience. Expanding rural connectivity is not just an infrastructure goal; it is a direct investment in the growth, competitiveness, and vitality of rural communities.

¹ GOV'T ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE, GAO-25-107207, BROADBAND PROGRAMS: AGENCIES NEED TO FURTHER IMPROVE THEIR DATA QUALITY AND COORDINATION EFFORTS, 10 (2025).

² *Id.* at 12.

³ *Id.* at 15.