

The Honorable Claudia Tenney (NY-22)

Member Testimony before the House Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee

I would like to thank Chairman Bishop, Ranking Member Fortenberry and the distinguished members of this Subcommittee for giving Members the opportunity to share their priorities with you today.

I am honored to represent New York's 22nd Congressional District, which is a largely rural district stretching from Lake Ontario in the North to the Pennsylvania border in the South. Over the last decade as our economy has rapidly gone digital, communities like mine have been left behind. One of the largest issues my constituents face is the lack of reliable, affordable internet access.

In today's world, your internet connection can determine your destiny. It shapes your access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. The COVID-19 pandemic has only driven this point home. Education, work, and healthcare is all online. Those who lack the bandwidth, lack the access.

To make matters even worse, Upstate New York is subject to a broadband monopoly. New York State agreed to a cable consolidation plan under an agreement with Spectrum, which they claimed would expand and improve service.

However, the State and New York Public Service Commission have absolutely failed to enforce the agreement. This has left too many rural customers in my district with nonexistent broadband service, or service that is far too expensive.

This is the reason I support a community funding project in the Village of Sherburne, New York. This project would greatly expand high quality internet to residents, providing larger bandwidths to a local school and healthcare facility in my district as well as allowing businesses and residents to access significantly faster service. This is going to open my community to greater opportunity. In addition, the new network will allow local customers to access multiple Internet Service Providers, giving them greater options at lower costs.

As we move forward with the USDA's ReConnect program, it is essential that we continue to support these types of projects while also making reforms to ensure the program is meeting the changing needs of communities. To this extent, I encourage this Subcommittee to review the definition of minimum internet service and determine if the definition still meets current needs. In the last decade, technology has transformed and current scheduled increase of the minimum download speed to 25 megabits per second simply is not high enough to meet the demands of many communities.

Higher standards for schools, healthcare facilities, and libraries are a must. Imagine your child not being able to stream an educational video or your doctor not having enough internet to adequately research a condition? It is also important that new expansions be able to host multiple

Internet Service Providers, so rural customers are given real choice to participate in a robust market, and not locked into an expensive monopoly like residents in my district.

Transparency and accountability were two critical factors that drove my support of this project. I am committed to ensuring any federal funding brought back to our region is spent transparently and responsibly. As with any federal program, Community Project Funds must adhere to the highest standards and I will hold community beneficiaries accountable. This project I am supporting today was rigorously reviewed, including extensive consultations with a variety of stakeholders. It has strong buy-in from the community as well as a clearly demonstrated benefit to my district.

As many of you likely know, New York State taxpayers pay more to the federal government than they get back in return. I will always advocate on behalf of my community and fight to return tax dollars to New York. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify before you today.