



April 23, 2024

Dear Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Information Technology Members:

On behalf of our state's 100 counties, we wanted to provide the committee additional information regarding county investments in state administered broadband infrastructure projects.

We sincerely appreciate the unprecedented opportunity for counties to participate in two major broadband infrastructure programs administered by the state – the federally funded Growing Rural Economies with Access to Technology (GREAT) grant program and the newly created Completing Access to Broadband (CAB) Program.

Responding to this historic investment of federal dollars, and authority granted by the General Assembly to spend them, counties throughout the state enthusiastically committed matching funds for broadband early on, as the Department of Information Technology (NCDIT) rolled out the federally funded GREAT grant program. As of today, 79 counties are contributing matching funds to jointly support GREAT grant projects, helping to connect more than 145,000 households to high-speed broadband internet access. After NCDIT awarded all the GREAT grants, the CAB program commenced.

To date, NCDIT reports that 36 counties have committed to providing a matching contribution for CAB projects – that is more than a third of all counties. The CAB program provides more opportunities for counties to make additional investments in areas to address not only unserved areas, but underserved areas as well. The timing of the CAB rollout and significantly higher county matching requirement will make the program difficult for certain counties. Counties that received a lower ARPA State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund (SLFRF) allocation had to balance urgent and other pandemic recovery needs within their communities. After participating in the GREAT grant program by contributing matching funds, and responding to other COVID-related needs, not all counties have sufficient SLFRF funds remaining to meet the CAB match requirement.

The removal of the county match requirement for the CAB program will allow more counties to participate in the grant program by submitting scopes of work that meet hard to reach areas of their communities. These counties that have a great need for this program do not have available funds to meet the match requirement and under current legislation, are prohibited from participating. We do not believe these counties should be excluded from the state's efforts to expand broadband.

We remain committed to our partnership with the NC Department of Information Technology and with this committee and the General Assembly and look forward to ensuring access to broadband in all 100 counties for all North Carolina residents.

Sincerely,

Amber Harris

NCACC Director of Government Relations