



Asa Hutchinson  
GOVERNOR

Michael Preston  
SECRETARY OF COMMERCE

June 11, 2020

Elizabeth Thomas Smith, JD  
Chair  
CARES Act Steering Committee  
Little Rock, AR 72201

**RE: CARES Act Funding Request for Broadband, \$19.3 Million**

Dear Secretary Smith:

The purpose of this letter is to 1.) officially request that the Department of Commerce be placed on the upcoming CARES Act Steering Committee agenda and 2.) request \$19.3 million in CARES Act funds for the deployment of broadband in the State of Arkansas. These funds will be utilized to help Arkansans in the areas of distance learning, telehealth/medicine, telework, etc. As Arkansas wrestles with the COVID-19 pandemic, broadband has become a lifeline and a key component for social distancing.

Broadband enables workers to telework, patients to use telemedicine services, K-12 and college students and unemployed workers in need of reskilling to participate in distance education, religious people to participate in online worship services, and all citizens to shop online, interact with friends through Skype and other video chat tools, and keep up with the latest news and public health guidelines.

We currently have upwards of 200,000 Arkansas households lacking access to broadband. This lack of access to broadband makes it difficult for those households to effectively practice social distancing. The lack of broadband in rural areas of the state has resulted in many school districts struggling to implement distance education due to a large fraction of their students not having broadband.

The Arkansas Rural Connect (ARC) program promotes broadband deployment in rural areas of Arkansas that lack meaningful or efficient broadband services. The ARC program and its purposes align with allowable uses of CARES Act funds.

While we hope that masks, contact tracing or possibly a vaccine may eventually dispel this pandemic, we must be prudent and prepare for the possibility that COVID-19 may force social distancing and intermittent school and workplace closures into the next year and beyond. Broadband is critical to Arkansas building resilience and adaptability in the face of this ongoing pandemic or any other health emergency that may come our way. We hope this committee will grant us the \$19.3 million of CARES Act funds so we can quickly bring broadband to as many Arkansans as possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Michael Preston".

Michael Preston  
Secretary