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December 8, 2020

Representative Laura Sibia, Chair
Joint Information Technology Oversight Committee
Vermont State House
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633-5301

Re: 10-Year Telecommunications Plan Update

Dear Representative Sibia:

As requested by the Joint Information Technology Oversight Committee at its November meeting, I am writing to detail the strategy the Department of Public Service is employing to prepare a 10-year Telecommunications Plan that complies in full with the requirements of 30 V.S.A. § 202d on or before June 30, 2021.¹

The Department will shortly issue an RFP for an outside consultant to support the development of the 10-Year Telecommunications plan using the \$250,000 appropriation designated for this purpose in the FY21 budget. The vendor will be selected in January, and the plan will be delivered to the Legislature on or before June 30, 2020.

Through its planning work and public engagement on the Emergency Broadband Action Plan this year, the Department repeatedly observed firsthand how living through the pandemic is raising acute awareness about the connectivity challenges facing Vermont and inspiring unprecedented energy for public engagement. In fact, this degree of engagement proved invaluable in both refining and executing on the Emergency Broadband Action Plan.² Accordingly, robust inclusivity and consideration of diverse perspectives will be the hallmark of the Department's collaborative approach to developing the 10-Year Telecommunications Plan.

In addition to its own outreach and collaboration activities, the Department intends to take maximal advantage of having outside experts on the team in developing this iteration of the

¹ In March of 2020, the General Assembly moved the deadline for delivering the 10-Year Telecom Plan to June 30, 2021.

² Vermont's Emergency Broadband Action Plan and related CRF appropriations by the General Assembly recently drew favorable notice in a report from the Pew Charitable Trust surveying state use of CARES Act funding for broadband deployment. See Kathryn de Wit, Pew Research Center, *States Tap Federal CARES Act to Expand Broadband*, November 16, 2020, available for review at <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/issue-briefs/2020/11/states-tap-federal-cares-act-to-expand-broadband>

10-Year Telecommunications Plan. The Department will ensure that the consultants liberally interface with the state agencies and other parties specified in the planning statute, as well as with a broad scope of external stakeholders and the public at large. This broad interface will be directed at producing a set of concrete recommendations and actionable steps Vermont can take to make meaningful progress in addressing the connectivity challenges facing our state for the foreseeable future.

The Department's strategy for preparing the 10-Year Telecommunications Plan also includes reviewing and capturing the value of the significant amount of telecommunications planning work that has been done recently in Vermont. In addition to the Emergency Broadband Action Plan, this body of work includes (1) the community based planning work done by Communications Union Districts pursuant to the Act 79 Broadband Innovation Grants program and the Act 137 COVID-Response Connected Community Resilience program, (2) the fact finding and policy analysis that culminated in the Electric Utility Feasibility Study commissioned by the Department in 2019, and (3) the Emergency COVID Response Telecommunications Recovery Plan commissioned by the Department pursuant to Act 137.³

The use of the \$500,000 of CARES Act funding for emergency telecom planning purposes required the state to limit that plan to a short-term, emergency driven scope to ensure compliance with United States Treasury Guidance.⁴ That said, the Department has reviewed the first draft of the Emergency COVID Response Telecommunications Recovery Plan and is pleased to report that this short-term plan is incidentally yielding data and insights that also lend themselves to informing the development of Vermont's long-term 10-Year Telecommunications Plan.

For instance, a significant amount of research went into the production of the Emergency COVID Response Telecommunications Plan, with hundreds of hours of interviews, thousands of survey responses, and mapping and data analyses. Most of the Emergency COVID Response Telecommunications Plan material will be continue to be fresh and relevant after December 30, 2020. The Department intends to leverage the work completed during the formulation of the Emergency COVID Response Telecommunications Plan. Examples of this work are:

1. Survey data collected from the online and telephonic survey;
2. Stakeholder interviews;
3. Data collection;
4. Mapping and data analyses;
5. Legal analyses and;
6. Project planning and analyses

By way of illustrating the leveraging opportunity, the Emergency COVID Response Telecommunications Plan contains an analysis of emergency communications initiatives and

³ The COVID Response Telecommunications Recovery Plan is on schedule to be delivered December 20, 2020.

⁴ The Department was advised by Guidehouse, the Administration's CRF programs consultant, on defining the permissible scope and purposes for the COVID Response Telecom Plan prior to executing a contract with the vendor.

requirements. While this analysis was specific to the pandemic, the Department expects that the consultants selected for the 10-Year Telecommunications Plan will be able to build productively upon this prior work.

As always, the Department welcomes input from JITOC and is available to answer any questions about the strategy for developing the 10-Year Telecommunications Plan.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "June E. Tierney". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "June" being the most prominent.

June E. Tierney
Commissioner
Vermont Department of Public Service