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Sent: Wednesday, April 21, 2021 3:00 PM

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Subject: [External] Broadband Access for Vermonters with low income

[External]

Dear Senator Cummings, Chair, Senator MacDonald, Vice Chair and Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

Broadband access may seem like a highly technical and somewhat dry subject, but the lack of it has real and profound impacts on the lives of people in Vermont. For example:

A young Mom with a chronically sick child has no access to the internet and very limited physical access to her physician. Broadband access would connect her to telehealth, lower her anxiety and strengthen the ability for her child to grow and thrive. Right now, she neither has the funding for potential access nor the knowledge and support to make that happen.

A Mom and Dad are home with three children. They are essential workers and their children are physically in school part time and are learning remotely the other days of the week. A grandparent looks after the children while they are home and their internet access is a weak "hot spot" connection, so they miss a lot of the information and interactions that the other students are able to get.

These are just a very few examples of the thousands of Vermonters who miss out on the benefits of, or experience greater risk and hardship from not having the adequate broadband access the rest of us take for granted as an expected "utility" like electricity or water & sewer service. Funding from CARES and the American Rescue plan gives us a unique and awesome opportunity to correct that inequity by bringing internet access to those who lack it.

The opportunity that you have before you as you plan for Broadband connectivity gives all Vermonters an avenue to jump into a technology connection that brings more equity and opportunity into their lives.

It brings increased access to better physical health, safe mental health, personal growth and financial security. It could bring affordability and planning to incorporate business, technology and community service to their home and into their futures.

We appreciate the way this can be possible both immediately and through long-term work with providers, networks, municipality-owned fiber optic cooperatives and through other creative solutions.

The Community Action Agencies making up the Vermont Community Action Partnership are ready to connect those we serve with the providers and the solutions available to them, both short and long-term.

Thank you for making this possible.

Tom Donahue – BROCC Community Action Agency
Sue Minter – Capstone Community Action Agency
Paul Dragon – CVOEO
Jenna O'Farrell – NEKCA
Steve Geller – SEVCA and VCAP President

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