

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 6, 2019

Mr. Joel Baxley
Acting Assistant to the Secretary for Rural Development
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C., 20250

Dear Mr. Baxley:

We write in support of the application submitted by the rural town of Roque Bluffs to the USDA Rural e-Connectivity Pilot Program. If funded, the town and its project partners will build a high-speed broadband network that serves the entire community and significantly improves the economic, educational, and health opportunities in Roque Bluffs.

Located in remote Washington County, Maine, Roque Bluffs is a small fishing and farming community that currently struggles to sustain its rural population and attract year-round residents due to outdated and unreliable internet infrastructure. According to the town, local commerce and business opportunities are limited, students cannot do online homework from home, and older residents in need of a reliable connection to receive health and related support services cannot age in place. Increasingly, the community's lobstermen and blueberry farmers require adequate internet access to conduct their business and to file online documents for regulatory compliance. The municipal complex in Roque Bluffs that includes a fire station, the town offices, and community computer lab has insufficient connectivity to provide even the most basic modern public services and online educational workshops for the local residents.

With its proposal to USDA, Roque Bluffs is taking a significant step to improve the local broadband infrastructure and to strengthen its future. By forming a unique public-private partnership with a local internet service provider, Roque Bluffs plans to deploy a broadband network that will serve the entire town for decades to come, enhance digital inclusion, and enable the many economic and social opportunities that are only made possible by 21st century connectivity. We applaud the town's tireless efforts to close the digital divide in rural Maine and improve the economy and quality of life for the people who live there.

Thank you for your time and consideration on behalf of the residents of Roque Bluffs. We encourage you to please carefully review their application, in accordance with all applicable laws and regulations, and ask that you please notify [REDACTED] when a final decision has been made.

Sincerely,



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator