

To: Senate Agriculture and Rural Development Finance and Policy Committee  
Chair, Senator Torrey Westrom  
Minnesota Senate Building, Room 1150  
Saint Paul, MN 55155

From: The Minnesota Rural Broadband Coalition  
2401 Broadway Ave #1  
Slayton, MN 56172



March 7, 2022

Dear Chair Westrom and Committee Members,

On behalf of our member organizations, the Minnesota Rural Broadband Coalition writes in **support of SF 3617**. This bill would appropriate an additional **\$110 million to the Border-to-Border Broadband Grant Program** by allocating the state's remaining portion of the American Rescue Plan Act's Capital Projects Fund. This funding would bring more long-term stability to a grant program that has only been funded on a one or two-year basis yet continues to do great work bringing broadband service to rural Minnesota.

During a recent committee hearing of the Senate Agriculture and Rural Development Committee on February 23<sup>rd</sup>, the Office of Broadband Development testified that the Administration intends to use the remaining \$110 million in the Capital Projects Fund for things not related to the Border-to-Border Grant Program. This would include money for devices like laptops or tablets as well as community facility projects like constructing or improving libraries and community schools, which are allowable expenses under Treasury guidance.

The pandemic has taught us that Minnesotans need broadband connections in their homes. 170,000 Minnesota households are not connected to 25mbps/3mbps connections (2022 state goal), and 240,000 households are not connected at 100mbps/20mbps (2026 state goal), mostly in rural areas. Students should not need to rely on libraries or schools to access the internet, and a laptop or tablet is rendered useless for the purposes of education if a child cannot access the internet in their home. Furthermore, federal funding for digital equity projects will soon be on its way to the state through programs in the Infrastructure, Investment, and Jobs Act that was approved in 2021.

SF 3617 would ensure that the Border-to-Border Grant Program continues to partner with trusted internet service providers to bring needed investment in our rural Minnesota communities.

Thank you for dedicating your time and resources to hearing this bill and emphasizing the importance of broadband in Minnesota.

Respectfully yours,

Jay Trusty  
Chair  
Minnesota Rural Broadband Coalition

# Minnesota Rural Broadband Coalition Members

