



**STORY COUNTY
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

**LISA HEDDENS
LINDA MURKEN
LATIFAH FAISAL**

Story County Administration
900 Sixth Street
Nevada Iowa 50201
515-382-7200
515-382-7206 (fax)

July 19, 2021

Office of the Chief Information Officer of the State of Iowa
200 E. Grand Ave.
Des Moines, IA 50309

RE: Empower Rural Iowa, Emergency Broadband Expansion Grant Program – NOFA #006

Dear Chief Information Officer and Review Committee:

We would like to express our full support of the Empower Rural Iowa, Emergency Broadband Expansion Grant application for Colo Telephone Company's (Colo Telephone) broadband plan for portions of rural Story County. The funding they have requested would help address the lack of adequate broadband Internet access and connectivity in the area. Due to Colo Telephone's long and successful history of providing state-of-the-art broadband service at modern speeds to other rural communities and their strong reputation for customer service and community commitment, we are confident in their capability to enhance broadband service for the residents of rural Story County.

As an underserved area with limited modern Internet services, residents of rural Story County are faced with many challenges, such as limited medical resources and distance barriers between patients, physicians, and facilities. Because of the rural nature of the area, students do not receive equitable broadband resources as compared to those in more urban areas. Rural students may lack the opportunity for research, distance learning, video, and other tools that advanced broadband can deliver.

Even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Story County was aware of ongoing needs for greater broadband connectivity through the county. Dating back to 2014, when Story County became a Connect Iowa community, we recognized the pivotal role technology plays in how businesses operate, how services are provided, and the degree to which our citizens need reliable internet access. Our Strategic Plan built on that work, stating that we will "Update and expand broadband connectivity needs assessment throughout Story County and explore options for expansion of services." COVID-19 cemented our commitment and dedication to addressing these needs.

Story County staff have been working with the Greater Des Moines Partnership (GDMP) to assess broadband needs in Story County and through the Central Iowa Region. The OCIO's map update identifies several areas significant areas of Story County where broadband falls within the tiers (categorized by download/upload speeds) identified by the Legislature and the

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OCIO as not being adequate. The results of the GDMP survey also show several underserved areas in Story County. Control Number 418448

With funding assistance from the Empower Rural Iowa Emergency Broadband Expansion Grant program, and a cash match provided by Story County, Colo Telephone's proposed expansion will enable the residents of rural Story County to overcome geographical distances, empower them through information, and bring the world to their fingertips. Additionally, we feel strongly that this project will enable greater collaboration and teamwork between community service centers, public safety offices, county offices, and municipal offices.

We respectfully ask you to consider Colo Telephone's proposal for their fiber project in rural Story County. It is extremely important that state broadband grant funding be obtained to provide much needed broadband service to this area.

Sincerely,



Lisa Heddens, Chair