

Fayette County Economic Development and Tourism

July 16, 2021

Office of the Chief Information Officer
Matt Behrens
Deputy Chief Information Officer
State of Iowa
200 East Grand Ave
Des Moines, IA 50309

Dear Deputy Chief Behrens:

As the Director for Fayette County Economic Development & Tourism, it is my pleasure to write a letter in support for the Empower Rural Iowa Broadband Grant Program (Notice of Funding Availability #006) application being submitted by Hawkeye Interconnect Company.

The COVID-19 pandemic made clear that there is a desire for individuals to relocate into rural areas that offer a slower pace living style and recreational opportunities. Fayette County sits in the heart of that opportunity. For that to be a possibility, Broadband access is a must.

As a local economic development partner, we see this effort to expand Broadband in rural Fayette County and Northeast Iowa as critical to our efforts to grow our population, support our workforce, and expand business development. Existing service for connectivity available to residents and businesses in the proposed funding area are inadequate and do not currently meet their needs. This effort, if funded, will support service of current and new customers in rural portions of Fayette County, creating opportunities for residents and businesses for distance learning and tele-work.

Expanding Broadband access in our rural areas is a key objective of Fayette County Economic Development & Tourism, therefore, I fully support the efforts of Hawkeye Interconnect Company and their partners as they seek external funding to support the proposed project

Please feel free to reach out with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



Mallory Hanson, Director
Fayette County Economic Development and Tourism

GUNDERSEN
PALMER LUTHERAN
HOSPITAL AND CLINICS

Office of the Chief Information Officer

Annette Dunn
200 E. Grand Ave.
Des Moines, IA 50309

Good Day,

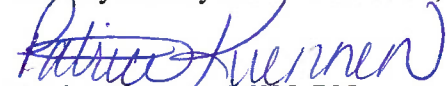
Please accept this letter of support for Hawkeye Telephone Company's application to the Empower Rural Iowa Broadband Grant Program Notice of Funding Availability #006 grant opportunity. This grant application requests funding to expand fiber broadband availability in Fayette County. Gundersen Palmer Lutheran Hospital & Clinics is one of six critical access networks put in place by Gundersen Health System (GHS) to provide increased access to underserved rural areas and represents a rural population that would greatly benefit from an award of this grant application.

These critical access hospitals and their associated clinics were constructed to provide care to underserved rural areas, which is best illustrated in the average population per square mile of 36.5 in these communities, which is just 42% of the national average. Expanding Access to Clinical Care Health Professional Shortage Areas is an issue throughout the Midwest, and it widens in the rural counties of Gundersen Palmer Hospital & Clinic's service area. The deficit grows wider with a 2,830:1 ratio for mental health providers compared to state's ratio of 700:1. Primary care provider shortage ratio equates to 2,860:1 compared to the state's ratio of 1,509:1.

Gundersen Palmer's service network includes a critical access hospital and outpatient clinic located in Fayette County, IA; along with additional Rural Health Clinics located in Allamakee and Clayton counties. Hawkeye Telephone Company's proposed broadband expansion would include the underserved areas in Fayette County, which according to US census data as of 7/1/2019 represent a population that broadly lacks access to broadband relative to the state and national averages. In Fayette County, only 76.4% of households possess a broadband connection. The US average for broadband is 82.7%.

Access to broadband plays a vital role in the current state of rural medicine, and that role is continuing to grow as our health system, along with others across the country, continue to expand telemedicine offerings in light of COVID-19. In response to the crisis, GHS instituted Project Phoenix, which set percentage-based goals for telemedicine usage across the entirety of the health system. GHS has committed to extending these goals beyond the pandemic, as a reimagining of care to provide greater access and efficiency for all patients moving forward. An award of the Hawkeye Telephone Company grant program will greatly aid in the scale of this project and allow for the increased telemedicine capacity to be used by rural Iowa patients in underserved areas. To that end, an award of the Hawkeye Telephone Company grant program would also help rural Iowa residents to realize travel-based cost savings. Many of our telemedicine programs would remove the need for patients to drive to their nearest hospital or clinic to receive care, especially those with chronic conditions that require frequent attention.

Thank you for your consideration,



Patrice Kuennen MSN, RN

Administrator ~ Gundersen Palmer Lutheran Hospital & Clinics

Palmer Lutheran Hospital
112 Jefferson Street
West Union, Iowa 52175
(563) 422-3811
Fax: (563) 422-9754

Fayette Clinic
110 King Street
Fayette, Iowa 52142
(563) 425-3381
Fax: (563) 425-4361

Postville Clinic
111 South Reynolds Street
Postville, Iowa 52162
(563) 864-7512
Fax: (563) 864-7511

West Union Clinic
110 Jefferson Street
West Union, Iowa 52175
(563) 422-3817
Fax: (563) 422-5937

Hawkeye Interconnect Company

PO Box 250

115 W Main St,

Hawkeye, Iowa 52147

Dear Hawkeye Interconnect Company,

I have recently learned Hawkeye Interconnect Company is applying for a grant to expand their fiber optic network to the rural residences and businesses in Fayette County to improve broadband availability with fast and reliable service. I am a rural resident in the proposed area of fiber expansion and fully support Hawkeye Interconnect Company's grant request due to a need for improved service in our area.

As pioneer Seed Salesman, I work from home frequently. I understand the importance of a fast reliable broadband connection. Farming is important, especially in the heart of Northeast Iowa. A reliable broadband connection is what allows myself, and other farmers I work with to complete necessary tasks to have a successful year.

Along with working from home a reliable internet connect is necessary for security purposes. It is always frustrating to miss footage on our security cameras due to an unstable broadband connection. Expanding fiber optic technology in the rural area will help resolve the issue.

The current availability of broadband in this area is insufficient. Residents who currently have Hawkeye Interconnect as a service provider have been extremely satisfied with their broadband service and would benefit from being a grant recipient to expand their current services to rural areas in Fayette County.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kurt Steinbronn', with a stylized, flowing script.

Kurt Steinbronn

15801 100th St

Maynard, IA 50655



July 19, 2021

To Whom it May Concern:

I am writing this letter of support of Hawkeye Interconnect Company applying for the Empower Rural Iowa Broadband Grant Program Notice of Funding Availability #006 funds. Our school district serves 1200 students of which 65% qualify for free or reduced lunch based on household income. It is not a stretch to say that we have significant connectivity issues. With more and more education happening virtually, it is imperative our students have effective and affordable internet access.

The lack of quality broadband in our district has made remote learning very difficult and even impossible for some of our students. This was especially difficult during the pandemic as we were using a hybrid method of schooling and many families did not have access to the internet, making it difficult or impossible for them to complete work from home.

Please let us know if you have any additional questions or if we can provide any additional information.

My best,

Joshua J. Ehn
Superintendent

**West Central Community School District**

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www.westcentral.school

Nichole Recker, President
Mary Ann Munger, Vice President
Chad Ingels
Marcia Streif
Josh VanSkyhawk

Gary Benda, Superintendent
Matthew Molumby, PK-12 Principal
Justin VerMeer, SBO/Board Secretary

To: Whom it may concern

From: Gary D. Benda, Shared Superintendent of Starmont and West Central Community School Districts

Re: Letter of Support for Empower Rural Iowa Broadband Grant Program of Notice Funding Availability #006

Date: July 26, 2021

This Letter of Support is written on behalf of the Hawkeye Interconnect Company. They have asked for my support to use grant funds to expand the broadband network. I am the shared superintendent of two school district that are located in Fayette and Clayton Counties. The principal communities are Westside, Maynard, Arlington, Lamont and Strawberry Point. These are small communities surrounded by rural areas. Our students and staff live in both the communities and rural areas. In our rural areas, as well as many rural areas across Iowa, internet connectivity is sometimes a luxury instead of the staple it should be. In today's global environment, rural and community access to stable internet is a must. As evidenced by our recent pandemic and the lingering after-effects, students and staff were forced to continue education through the use of remote/virtual learning opportunities. We provided devices to our students and in some cases their parents to help meet the educational needs of our students. This often looked like students at home or in other areas that had access to internet, connecting with their classmates and teachers via internet capable devices. Their classmates and teachers were similarly located in areas that had access to the internet. It did not matter how many or the quality of the devices that we provided, education ceased when connectivity ceased.

Our area suffered many delays, outages and an inability to give students, parents, educational staff and community access to one another. Yet, we were forced to maintain virtual communication in order to slow the spread of the pandemic. Our students and communities need better access to internet connectivity without the crisis of a pandemic. So much of our students' learning in a global society depends on being able to connect with different areas of the globe via the internet from rural areas that are extreme distances away. The only way student learning can take place is with reliable access to the internet. Many of our families can't afford to upgrade their connectivity or move to more populated areas with greater connectivity. Our rural areas and communities need access to stable internet connectivity just to meet the educational needs of our students and the basic needs of our communities and rural areas. This should never be a luxury or a need that can be addressed by a parent's ability to buy better access. This should be a staple in our society that is equally available to all communities and rural areas.

The proposed expansion area by the Hawkeye Interconnect Company begins to address the needs of our students and communities and rural areas. It is our hope that their initial success will lead to further expansion and further meets the needs of our communities and rural areas. By meeting their needs, you also allow our teachers to meet the learning needs of our students.

Gary D. Benda