

## United States Senate

October 25, 2022

Lawrence E. Strickling  
Assistant Secretary for Communications and Information  
Office of the Administrator  
National Telecommunications and Information Administration  
U.S. Department of Commerce  
1401 Constitution Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Assistant Secretary Strickling:

I write today in support of the National Telecommunications and Information Administration's Middle Mile Grant (MMG) Program application submitted by Cumberland and Salem Counties in southern New Jersey. I hope you will give this proposal full and fair consideration.

In Cumberland and Salem Counties, there are many unserved and underserved areas with extremely slow or no broadband access. The lack of reliable, high-speed internet is a major hindrance on the quality of life of residents throughout these counties. As you know, high-speed internet access is a basic and modern necessity for opportunities in employment, education, and social mobility—the importance of which has been permanently affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. A major obstacle to affordable, quality connectivity is the lack of competition between providers. Few providers in these counties can overcome the costs of creating their own middle-mile infrastructure to provide last-mile service to end users, putting thousands of low-to-moderate income residents at a severe disadvantage. In addition, current FCC 477 data seriously overestimates local coverage, allowing companies to eschew providing service to many areas.

If funded, the project partners would create a fiber-optic network throughout Cumberland and Salem Counties, which would cover middle-mile infrastructure costs and allow more local providers to offer last-mile service, thereby increasing competition between providers and improving broadband access for communities in need. The project also has the potential to strengthen the region's cellular communications system, enhance its E911 network, and extend high-speed internet service to anchor institutions like schools and healthcare providers. Expanding high-speed internet access is key to unlocking economic and social development throughout southern New Jersey.

I appreciate your careful review of this application and ask that you give it all due consideration. Please feel free to contact my staff at (973) 639-8700 should you have any questions or comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'C. B.', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator