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March 2, 2022

Honorable Jessica Rosenworcel
Chairwoman
Federal Communications Commission
45 L Street NE
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairwoman Rosenworcel:

Congratulations on your historic confirmation to chair the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). And thank you for your recent actions to update the FCC rulebook to allow more Tribes to connect to the E-rate program. I write today to invite you to visit New Mexico for a tour of the most pressing and unique broadband challenges that our communities face, from Pueblos to rural and unincorporated communities.

While broadband mapping and access figures have their limitations, what the current mapping numbers show is already extremely troubling. New Mexico has the highest percentage of residents in the Southwest without adequate broadband internet service. According to the White House, 22 percent of our residents do not have access to adequate broadband infrastructure and nearly 70 percent have to rely on only one Internet Service Provider. Recent National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) data also shows that in at least 5 out of 33 New Mexico counties, more than 40 percent of households do not have internet access at all.

The lack of access to broadband internet service in New Mexico has created an uneven playing field for our communities. This impacts our school children, our businesses, and our healthcare. Too many of our children had to rely purely on handouts through much of the pandemic, because the virtual school provided to so many children elsewhere was wholly unavailable to those without broadband internet. But even before and long after the pandemic, the lack of broadband internet has and will continue to hold New Mexico back through its economic and health impacts.

Without broadband connectivity, entire rural, unincorporated, and Tribal communities are left without the means to diversify and grow their economies. They cannot attract tourists to their communities and the beauty of their lands without an online presence and reliable online access once those tourists arrive. They cannot access national, much less global, markets to sell their unique goods and services. They are, in short, left to compete in 2022 with infrastructure from the 1970s.

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New Mexico's severe shortage of healthcare providers is also directly exacerbated by the lack of broadband access in our rural and unincorporated communities. Thirty-two of New Mexico's 33 counties are considered Health Professional Shortage Areas by the Health Resource and Services Administration (HRSA) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). While New Mexico continues to work to remedy this long-standing shortage and its severe impacts on the residents of our state, the lack of broadband access deprives us of relying on telehealth as the solution it could be otherwise.

The bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act provides substantial formula funding to begin to address the desperate need for broadband infrastructure across New Mexico and to some of our most vulnerable and disconnected communities. I will be working with our communities to apply for as much of the competitive funding as they are eligible for. Because we recognize the extraordinary opportunity this infrastructure development presents to our state's future. This is also why I am excited to extend this invitation to you.

Your in-person visit to New Mexico will include visiting with local stakeholders to learn firsthand about New Mexico's geographic challenges and unique opportunities. My team stands ready to assist in preparing an itinerary for your visit. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Martin Heinrich', is positioned above a horizontal line.

Martin Heinrich
United States Senator