LOCAL OFFICIALS SHARE WHY BROADBAND HAS BEEN ESSENTIAL FOR EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND URGE THE FCC TO COORDINATE WITH LOCAL LEADERSHIP ON BROADBAND DEPLOYMENT STRATEGIES

Washington, D.C. (April 3, 2020) – Today Next Century Cities sent a letter to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) urging the agency to collaborate with mayors and other local officials on broadband deployment. As residents are forced to work, access virtual classrooms, obtain medical care, and more from their homes, local officials have been working tirelessly to ensure that every resident stays connected during the national coronavirus (COVID-19) shut-in.

Click [here](https://nextcenturycities.org/news/2020/4/3/local-officials-share-why-broadband-has-been-essential-for-emergency-response-and-urge-the-fcc-to-coordinate-with-local-leadership-on-broadband-deployment-strategies) to review the letter. Next Century Cities asks the Commission to consider the following points. FCC and Congress are working to ensure that Americans have access to high-speed connectivity, but we can and need to do more.

- Stimulus funds from the Senate bill should be used to expand the E-Rate program, allowing schools and libraries to purchase hotspots and loan those devices to Americans of all ages who do not have internet access at home. The FCC should also strengthen the Lifeline program, which was designed to keep people connected in the wake of an emergency.
- Telehealth and telemedicine programs depend on reliable broadband networks. Building reliable networks that reach communities in remote places requires federal policies that support local solutions.
- Local officials have the clearest view of what their communities need, yet they are noticeably absent from FCC advisory committees. Their insights would help accelerate broadband deployment.
- The Commission should revise its definition of broadband by increasing minimum speeds to meet new market demands.

In Ammon, Idaho, broadband is essential infrastructure. [Mayor Sean Coletti](https://nextcenturycities.org/about/leadership/our-leadership/meet-sean-coletti) described how high-speed connectivity for residents and business has helped in its emergency response:

“\nThe City of Ammon's fiber optic utility made it possible for residents to stay at home while continuing to attend school, work, conduct business, and receive medical treatment. Ammon is home to hundreds of employees of the Idaho National Laboratory. The Lab serves as one of the nation's premier nuclear research facilities and the fifth largest employer in the state. On March 17th, the Lab encouraged employees to work from home if possible and transitioned to ‘minimum-safe plus’ status on March 26th. Lab employees have found it seamless to convert to working from home with Ammon Fiber and the City is proud to play such a key role in keeping essential facilities like the INL operational.\n"
“Ammon Fiber is affordable, safe, and reliable. In fact, Ammon has some of the lowest costs for 1 Gig fiber in the nation, and we have a plan to bring Ammon Fiber to all neighborhoods in the City. We believe our open-access fiber network to be a vital component of who we are, and what we will become. Our slogan is "Where Tomorrow Begins." Ammon is committed to bringing the vision of tomorrow to its residents today.”

In Hanover, New Hampshire, near the state’s largest trauma medical center, many communities remain underserved or unserved. Julia Griffin, Town Manager, described their resident’s frustration:

“Here in rural New Hampshire, large portions of the state are woefully underserved or completely unserved by broadband. As soon as statewide school closure was announced by our Governor almost three weeks ago, my phone and email blew up with queries from Hanover residents wondering what the Town could do to improve or provide broadband services immediately to ensure that parents and their children could work and learn from home.

“Nothing like a pandemic crisis to highlight the extent to which rural America has been shortchanged.”

Aldona Valicenti, Chief Information Officer, Lexington Fayette Urban County Government, explained how connectivity, or lack thereof, impacts schools and businesses in Kentucky:

“The need for broadband is demonstrated every day during this COVID-19 crisis. Our Governor and Mayor are requiring working from home for those employees who can. Our universities and schools are continuing education even with empty classrooms. We can do that because we have broadband. Many unserved and underserved areas cannot take part. This is an urgent wakeup call for the entire nation.”

In Mount Vernon, Washington, municipal broadband allowed the local government to maintain functionality while implementing emergency response plans. According to Mayor Jill Boudreau:

“During the COVID-19 pandemic, we rely on video conferencing, completely online building permitting, online bill pay, and electronic resources in our public library just to name a few examples. The reliability and security of an institutional network has not only kept City functions operating, but our hospital, 911 center, and County government working at full capacity.”

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Next Century Cities is a non-profit membership organization of over 200 communities, founded to support communities and their elected leaders, including mayors and other officials, as they seek to ensure that all have access to fast, affordable, and reliable internet access. For more information, visit www.nextcenturycities.org.