

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4606

COMMITTEES:
FINANCE
BANKING, HOUSING, AND
URBAN AFFAIRS
BUDGET
INTELLIGENCE
RULES AND ADMINISTRATION

November 23, 2020

The Honorable Steven T. Mnuchin
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Treasury
1500 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, D.C. 20220

Dear Secretary Mnuchin,

Households across the country continue to struggle to make it through this public health emergency without access to broadband. The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the importance of broadband in accessing essential services, with an unprecedented number of Americans now reliant on internet connectivity to access public benefits, search for employment, learn and work from home, and access telehealth services. Lack of broadband access has prevented Americans in underserved communities from meaningfully participating in the digital economy even before the pandemic, and under current circumstances, this lack of access threatens to have a significant and potentially long-lasting impact on existing economic, health, and educational disparities.

The CARES Act provided \$150 billion in funding for the Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF), which serves as a critical lifeline for states and localities that are navigating the challenges of COVID-19. Many CRF recipients are using this funding to expand access to telehealth services, distance learning, and telework by deploying broadband in underserved areas. While localities are working hard to obligate their CRF allocations before the December 30, 2020 deadline, I have heard directly from local leaders across Virginia that unclear guidance on the allowed uses of the funding has delayed the obligation of funds to broadband projects. As a result, localities need more time to obligate this vital funding to communities that still lack reliable access to broadband.

To expand the reach of CARES funding and enable more households to get connected through these projects, I respectfully request the Department of the Treasury to extend the December 30, 2020 deadline by which states and localities must obligate CARES funding. I also request that you publish updated guidance that clarifies that states and localities are able to use CARES funding for broadband projects, even where the projects won't be completed by, or even begun building by, the CARES Act deadline so long as they've finalized a project plan by that time.

I look forward to your response. If you should have any questions or concerns, please contact Rafi Martina in my office at 202-224-2023.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mark R. Warner". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mark R. Warner
United States Senator