Dairyland Power Cooperative
3200 East Ave S
La Crosse, WI 54601

September 12, 2022

Re: NTIA Middle Mile Grant Support

To Whom It May Concern:

In April of 2021, the Pierce Pepin Cooperative Services (PPCS) Board of Directors authorized the management to pursue building a fiber to the home network in our service area. PPCS is an electric distribution cooperative located in Ellsworth, WI and has been in business since the late 1930's[1]. PPCS estimated in 2021 that nearly 5,500 locations in the co-ops service area lacked broadband connectivity. The first phase of fiber construction began in September 2021 with the goal of building 175 miles and passing by 1500 homes. Our Phase 2 project kicked off earlier this year and once completed another 460 miles of fiber will be built passing by 2500 homes. Our broadband subsidiary, SwiftCurrent Connect, has connected over 600 homes in the last 8 months. These connections are truly transforming our communities and improving the lives of cooperative members.

One of the first issues we encountered in building a fiber network is connectivity to an upstream provider through a DIA circuit. Our options were limited and our ability to connect required us to build nearly 10 miles of fiber just to provide this circuit access. The lack of middle-mile fiber was truly astonishing.

The state of Wisconsin has good connectivity along east-west corridors due to the interstate system that runs from the Chicago/Milwaukee/Madison area to Minneapolis/St. Paul. There is also connectivity that runs east along interstate 90 from La Crosse, Wisconsin to Madison. The proposed project that Dairyland Power Cooperative is submitting will provide a much-needed north to south route. It also traverses through rural areas in which rural providers like SwiftCurrent Connect could tap into this middle-mile network.

Dairyland Power Cooperative is a perfect candidate for this funding as it's a member-owned cooperative that is owned and governed by the 24 distribution cooperatives that it serves. These cooperatives service hundreds of thousands of rural residents that are often the most underserved when it comes to broadband access. Dairyland Power Cooperative has the know-how and the ability to build this network and we ask for your commitment in approving this project.

Sincerely,

Nate Boettcher
President & CEO
Pierce Pepin Cooperative Services
SwiftCurrent Connect

[1] PPCS is organized as a not-for-profit [501(c)12] member-owned cooperative in the state of Wisconsin.