Beaver Island Rural Health Center

37304 Kings Highway
P. O. Box 146
Beaver Island, MI 49782
Phone: 231-448-2275
Fax: 231-448-2348
E-mail :
info@biruralhealth.org

BOARD of DIRECTORS
Officers
President: Frank D'Andraia
Vice President:
Diane McDonough
Treasurer *(Acting)*:
Frank D'Andraia

Directors
Larry Birch
Donna Kubic
Lori Taylor-Blitz
Leslie Visser
Constance Wojan

Emeritus Directors
Denny Cook
Anne Glendon
Barbara Murphy, CCRM
Joe Reed
Don Spencer
Connie Wojan
James Wojan

STAFF
Kaylyn Jones, MedAdm Asst
Daniel Mann, MD, Medical Dir
John Martin, DO, Supv Phys
Joan Matejovsky, FNP-C
Ann Partridge, Managing Dir
Nicole Shepardson, Svcs Coord

September 26, 2022

Sarah Bleau
Middle Mile Director
Office of Internet Connectivity and Growth
National Telecommunications and Information Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20230

RE: Support for Peninsula Fiber Network NTIA Enabling Middle Mile Application

Dear Director Bleau:
I am writing on behalf of the Beaver Island Rural Health Center (BIRHC) to support Peninsula Fiber Network's (PFN) application for the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) Enabling Middle Mile Infrastructure Program. PFN proposes to construct fiber optic links under Lake Michigan that would connect the island to the mainland in the Upper Peninsula and Lower Peninsula. In addition to providing a redundant link between our state's two peninsulas, it also provides critically needed high-speed backhaul for Beaver Island.

While Beaver Island is a vibrant small community, it is hampered by the lack of adequate broadband service. This deficit is especially problematic for the BIRHC. We are the sole provider of medical services on the island. While we have full-time nurse practitioners on our staff, there are no full-time doctors available on the island. The result is that patients often must travel to the mainland for medical services, many of them routine. The connectivity now available at our location is not sufficient to support robust telemedicine service. Indeed, its reliability is such that we sometimes are unable to timely transmit medical data to the mainland to support patient visits there.

PFN's planned dual fiber links would also address a safety issue on the island. Essentially all of our current connections to the mainland are through a location that is served by one carrier that has experienced repeated service outages. The result is a loss of all communications from the island to the mainland dependent on those links. This means not only no internet service, but also no voice service off the island and no 9-1-1 service because our 9-1-1 center is on the mainland. This is a critical public safety issue attention to which is long overdue.

In addition to the issues presented for safety, and the efficient and affordable delivery of healthcare on the island, the lack of adequate broadband service limits economic development on the island and precludes educational opportunities at our island school. It limits our ability to attract qualified employees and, because of all of these factors, presents a threat to the future sustainability of the island. The PFN proposal presents an important opportunity to connect Beaver Island with the mainland giving our residents a secure and resilient broadband connection. Approving this project will allow the expansion of existing services and, eventually, the construction of fiber-based service on the island that will make available to the BIRHC the gigabit service envisioned for healthcare locations in the act creating the BEAD grant program.
Accordingly, the BIRHC strongly encourages NTIA to approve PFN's middle mile application.

Sincerely,

[redacted]

Frank D'Andraia
President

Providing high-quality, cost-effective patient treatment and wellness services to the whole Beaver Island Community