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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6000

202-224-2035

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February 16, 2018

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
S128 Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Vice Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
S128 Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Cochran and Ranking Member Leahy:

As you prepare to implement the budget agreement contained in the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018, I write to offer recommendations on federal investments that would support America's economy, spur new high-paying jobs, enhance public safety, and improve quality of life in rural communities throughout Michigan and America.

The Bipartisan Budget Act dedicated \$20 billion over the next two years for federal infrastructure investments, including many priorities for small towns and rural communities. As you consider how these funds will be used moving forward, I urge the Committee to dedicate at least \$2.5 billion to rural high-speed internet, clean water infrastructure, and essential rural community facilities programs in the FY2018 Agriculture, Rural Development, and Related Agencies appropriations bill.

Over 34 million Americans, including 23 million rural Americans, do not have internet service available to them at an adequate speed and quality. In Michigan, over 1 million people do not have access to high-speed internet. Broadband is not a luxury – every Michigan business owner, farmer, student, hospital, and family deserves access to high-speed internet. Additional funding to USDA rural broadband programs will give our small towns the opportunities they need for affordable high-speed internet expansion in their communities.

Another infrastructure priority that is often overlooked is water and wastewater infrastructure. Well-maintained water infrastructure systems are vital for the quality of life in our small towns and rural communities. The Flint water crisis may be the most visible reminder of the serious public health consequences from neglecting drinking water infrastructure, but drinking water systems in communities of all sizes across Michigan require much needed capital investment. Over the next 20 years, the Environmental Protection Agency estimates that nearly \$16 billion in investment is needed just to maintain drinking water systems in Michigan. Additionally, in 2017, Michigan had a \$100 million backlog of clean water projects in line for USDA's Rural Development water programs. Additional funding for USDA's Rural Development water programs is critical to ensuring clean and affordable drinking water.

Just as our connectivity and clean water access is in need of repair, so too are the essential community facilities that improve the quality of life in small towns across the country. By sending additional funding to USDA's Community Facilities Program, we will be able to invest in more

critical infrastructure projects such as hospitals, healthcare clinics, schools, police and fire stations, food banks, and community libraries. Investing in essential community facilities like healthcare centers and hospital facilities will also help our small towns and rural communities in battling the opioid epidemic.

Thank you for your considerations of these requests. I stand ready to work with you in a bipartisan fashion to help fund infrastructure investments that are critical to the State of Michigan and the entire country.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Debbie Stabenow", with a horizontal line underneath.

Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member