

## United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4105

August 4, 2021

The Honorable Evelyn Remaley  
Acting Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Communications and Information  
National Telecommunications and Information Administration  
U.S. Department of Commerce  
1401 Constitution Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Acting Assistant Secretary Remaley:

The last eighteen months underscored the extent to which broadband has become an essential part of daily American life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Overnight, millions of Americans relied on broadband services to work, learn, socialize, obtain medical services, and otherwise communicate from home. The pandemic demonstrated how our broadband networks could withstand the unexpected surge in demand, but it also highlighted that some areas of the country lack service entirely. In recognition of this, Congress allocated over \$1.5 billion to the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) to address broadband gaps in tribal areas, rural areas, and minority communities.

Unfortunately, we are concerned that rather than dedicating its time and resources to the efficient and expert implementation of these programs, NTIA is instead advertising to crowdsource one of the most important aspects of these programs: application review. NTIA is advertising that these reviewers will not only assist, but be an “integral part of the overall grant review and award process”<sup>1</sup> by assessing applications and determining which will proceed to the next stage for possible funding. It is alarming that NTIA finds it appropriate to offload this important work to volunteers. The last time NTIA used crowdsourcing for its Broadband Technology Opportunities Program, it faced great criticism for having made no appreciable progress in closing broadband gaps.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *NTIA Grant Program Merit Reviewers*, NTIA. July 1, 2021.

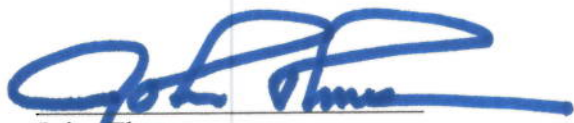
[https://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/sites/default/files/2021-07/NTIA%20Grant%20Program%20Merit%20Reviewers%20FAQs\\_7.1.21\\_Final\\_0.pdf](https://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/sites/default/files/2021-07/NTIA%20Grant%20Program%20Merit%20Reviewers%20FAQs_7.1.21_Final_0.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., “*NTIA seeks volunteers to review broadband applications*,” Network World, <https://www.networkworld.com/article/2259488/ntia-seeks-volunteers-to-review-broadband-applications.html> <http://muniwireless.com/2009/07/08/ntia-seeks-volunteers-for-grant-applications/>

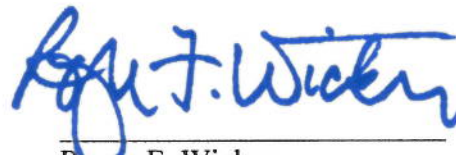
Allowing volunteers to review applications suggests NTIA lacks the qualified staff and technical expertise necessary to administer current or future broadband programs. We urge you to reconsider this process and carry out the duties Congress has entrusted to you.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



John Thune  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Communications, Media,  
and Broadband  
U.S. Senate



Roger F. Wicker  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Commerce,  
Science, and Transportation  
U.S. Senate