

Chaffee County Economic Development Corporation

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Public Policy Committee Pillar Position Statement

Date: August, 2022

Issue: Broadband

Background:

For individuals, businesses, schools, health care providers and communities to be competitive, they must have access to affordable broadband services to move the data that allows them to work, learn, manage health, and communicate with loved ones. The Chaffee County EDC encourages and supports thoughtful public/private/academic partnerships to invest in – and to attract investment in – “shovel-ready” broadband infrastructure projects that support economic development and quality of life in the region.

Historically, rural regions of our country have been overlooked in the deployment of this critical infrastructure.

In recent years both state and federal officials have increased their focus around broadband deployment. As recently as May 2022 the Federal Government announced the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), an initiative included in the recently passed infrastructure package. The program includes the country’s 20 leading internet providers—covering more than 80 percent of the U.S. population across urban, suburban, and rural areas—who have agreed to either increase speeds or cut prices, making sure they all offer ACP-eligible households high-speed, high-quality internet plans for no more than \$30/month. ACP is the largest high-speed internet affordability program in the nation’s history. Experts estimate that 48 million households—or nearly 40 percent of households in the country—qualify for the program. How the program will be deployed is to be determined.

Closer to home, the State of Colorado also offers grants through the Office of Information Technology (OIT), which allows communities to take steps to address local challenges, with a special focus on middle and last mile infrastructure. For example, the building of two new tower sites that would increase access for Chaffee County residents and businesses was approved for funding in 2016.

The Chaffee County EDC supports the advancement of “shovel ready” broadband projects that will be attractive when one-time funding opportunities arise.

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Any previous action/intersection with issue for Chaffee County EDC

The Chaffee County EDC was vital in the formation of Colorado Central Telecom (CCT) during its early years. The formation of CCT is one of the reasons we have enjoyed the benefits related to the proliferation of remote work and remote workers in recent years.

Position:

The EDC encourages efforts at the local, state and federal levels that will bring better access to affordable, reliable broadband infrastructure to Chaffee County. This includes taking steps to ensure “shovel-ready” broadband projects exist as federal funding becomes available.

Rationale for Position:

Now more than ever—with federal funding opportunities for broadband looming and increased demand due to remote learning, healthcare, and work—Chaffee County’s future economic success, like that of all regions, is tied to access to affordable, reliable broadband service. The Chaffee County EDC is eager to bring together the private and public sector to address this issue in a manner that benefits the region.