



## LOUISIANA SENATE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**DATE: February 18, 2020**

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### **SENATOR BETH MIZELL ISSUES THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT**

#### ***RE: RURAL BROADBAND ACCESS***

**District 12 State Senator Beth Mizell, Chair of the Task Force on Access to Broadband High-Speed Internet Service, issues the following statement relative to rural broadband access:**

Dear readers:

You may be reading this in traditional newspaper form or, more likely, in an online format that allows you to stay informed no matter where you are. That gives the reason for this letter. Most of the residents of Louisiana, outside of our major cities, do not have adequate access to the internet.

I live in Stony Point, Louisiana (between Franklinton and Amite). It's a gorgeous place to live, to raise a family and to enjoy all that Louisiana has to offer - as long as it's not an internet connection.

As I campaigned for re-election in 2019, this was a common frustration shared by my constituents. People are frustrated. Our rural families can't take online courses to further their career choices. They cannot participate in sleek, new TeleHealth programs from their medical providers, which is even more important in a rural community. They cannot complete simple forms or applications online that others can take for granted. They can't even video conference with grandchildren who have moved away from Louisiana.

The federal government has recognized this concern and acknowledged that much of rural America is being left behind and our economic success and quality of life is suffering

because of it. For this reason, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has recently dedicated \$20 billion to disburse to rural areas. There will be a reverse auction, or bidding process, to distribute those funds. Applications are due by October of this year.

Examples are out there. Our neighbor, Mississippi, has recently passed a Broadband Initiative that would give their regional electric cooperatives the power to administer broadband to their customers. The results of this initiative are still undetermined in Mississippi, but I applaud the forward-thinking and determination of Mississippi lawmakers to reach rural areas with connectivity in an innovative and efficient way.

In the 2019 legislative session, I carried a resolution creating the Louisiana Rural Broadband Task Force. That Task Force recently held its last meeting, timed in order to allow legislation filing for this upcoming session. Stakeholders from around the state shared many ideas and described many obstacles to rural broadband implementation in Louisiana's rural communities.

Here were three major concerns:

1. Companies that build Broadband towers and infrastructure are not given same right-of way easements as utility companies.
2. Our electric utility co-ops have legal prohibitions from engagement in any other form of business.
3. Small, rural-focused internet providers have few resources to guide them through the bureaucracy involved in federal fund awards.

There will be legislation this session to ease the process and enable those who have worked toward expanding rural connectivity. If you live in rural Louisiana, and want better access to internet, please consider reaching out to your legislators and encouraging them to support these programs.

We all benefit when we can all connect.

**Senator Mizell can be reached by phone at 985.839.3936, by email at [mizellb@legis.la.gov](mailto:mizellb@legis.la.gov), or by mail at 1051 Main Street, Franklinton, LA 70438.**

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