



Thursday, May 14, 2020

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.  
Prime Minister of Canada  
Prime Minister's Office  
80 Wellington Street  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A3  
pm@pm.gc.ca

### **Rural Access to Broadband**

Dear Prime Minister,

The reality for almost everyone in our province drastically changed in March. In order to protect our most vulnerable from COVID-19 and to curb the spread of the virus, we all needed to self-isolate. For a great number of people, this means working and learning from home via the internet as well as applying for much needed federal and provincial supports online. COVID-19 has put a spotlight on substandard broadband services available in rural Canada and it has become very apparent that people living in rural Ontario are at a disadvantage. The digital divide has never been more apparent.

In rural areas, CRTC data suggests as few as 40.8 per cent of Canadian households have access to high-speed broadband. (*CBC News May 2, 2020*)

Additional funding for rural broadband in the wake of COVID-19 is essential. As a critical component of the economic relief and stimulus measures, important investments must be made to boost the pace and scale of broadband deployment efforts.

Increased funding from both the Province of Ontario and the Government of Canada is urgently needed to address our region's large connectivity gaps, so that we can close the digital divide and restart our economies. The Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus supports the funding of existing shovel ready, municipally led models that will connect our rural economies at an accelerated pace. We support SWIFT as Southwestern Ontario's funding mechanism to advance the expansion of critical broadband infrastructure across the region. The model works, it delivers results and can be immediately leveraged to upgrade networks and coverage in our region's underserved areas.

Families and business in our rural areas have been shut out of the economy and society as a result of the pandemic. COVID -19 has underscored the need in urgency to address gaps in broadband services across our region.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jim Ginn', is written over a light blue background.

Jim Ginn  
Chair, Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus

cc. *Hon. Maryam Monsef, Minister of Rural Economic Development*  
*Members of Parliament, Western Ontario*  
*Member Counties of Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus*