



## 2021 Legislative Priority

### Issue:

Expand broadband to the unserved and underserved

### Background:

In recent years, the Indiana General Assembly has made meaningful steps toward expanding broadband to rural Hoosiers living in unserved areas. The pandemic has highlighted the extent of the challenges that still exist for unserved and underserved areas. It has become clear that the need for high-quality broadband to the last mile, last home and last acre is as essential as water or power.

The pandemic did not cause issues with broadband, but it has put a focus on the problem. Now more than ever, it is obvious that broadband is how Hoosiers communicate and relate to each other. It's how our kids do e-learning, how farmers use production ag technology, how more and more people use telehealth, how many access remote work and simple everyday connectivity.

While several rural areas in Indiana continue to be unserved, many more are underserved. The questions that still remain: (1) what kind of statutory framework is needed to help the underserved, (2) how can the state assist local communities and (3) what funding options are possible at the state and at the local levels to enable broadband expansion particularly to low population areas.

### Story Points:

- Many of the areas of the state are not only unserved but underserved. COVID-19 highlighted the problems that still currently exist as it relates to access to broadband. How has poor broadband impacted you, your family and your farming operation?
- Broadband infrastructure investment is needed to eliminate the digital divide and shape the future of Indiana citizens. Like all other infrastructure, broadband investment is critical to realizing the full potential of the Indiana economy.
- The availability of higher broadband speeds is an urgent need to support k-12 education, higher education, workforce development, remote work opportunities, critical telehealth services and emerging agriculture technology.

### Key Message/ Ask:

- Please continue funding for the Next Level Connections Grant Program and allow those dollars to be used for underserved areas by increasing minimum upload/download speeds that will meet future needs.
- Please give county government the ability to create a Broadband Investment Authority that will allow counties and regions to invest in internet infrastructure in collaborative agreements or public private partnerships.
- Please give the Indiana Finance Authority the ability to create a Broadband Investment Revolving Loan Fund and sell to capitalize the fund.