



March 6, 2023

Mr. Eric Frederick
Chief Connectivity Officer
State of Michigan - High-Speed Internet Office

Dear Mr. Frederick

The Southwest Michigan Chamber of Commerce supports Midwest Energy & Communications (MEC)'s application for funding from the Realizing Opportunities with Broadband Infrastructure Networks (ROBIN) program - a grant opportunity that provides \$238.7 million to internet service providers (ISPs), like MEC, to expand their networks across Michigan.

As the largest chamber in our region, we understand that high-speed, fiber-optic broadband service is absolutely critical to stimulating economic development, retaining jobs, attracting new businesses, and increasing overall business prosperity. In addition to the economic benefits, an affordable and robust connection has become increasingly essential to social interactions, telehealth, telecommuting, homework assignments, and many other activities in today's society. Unfortunately, too many residents in the communities we represent remain unserved and underserved by this necessary amenity.

That is why we fully support MEC's application to Michigan's ROBIN program. MEC has built a national reputation for helping bridge the digital divide by connecting people for the first time to gigabit symmetrical services. By all accounts, their work has been life changing for the residents of Southwest Michigan.

Already successful in recent FCC auctions (RBE, CAF-II and RDOF), MEC is committed to expanding their services even deeper into rural areas including those in Cass, Berrien, St. Joseph and Van Buren Counties. This is exciting! Even more exciting is their willingness to consider a "zero-dollar" plan in concert with the FCC's Affordable Connectivity Plan (ACP) to those deemed eligible for this benefit. As many struggle in our region with the affordability of access, this addresses that issue head-on.

Supporting MEC and others willing to help bridge the digital divide is the only way we can accomplish our vision of propelling Southwest Michigan to national prominence as a place where business thrives, talent resides, and quality of life is second to none. Therefore, as Southwest Michigan's "*Voice for Business*," we respectfully ask that your office give strong consideration to approving the funding requested by MEC to further expand broadband throughout our region.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Arthur A. Havlicek". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Arthur A. Havlicek
President & CEO

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