

U.S. Sen. Baldwin: Advocates for rural broadband in Wisconsin

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) joined a bipartisan group of senators in urging U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue to expand access to rural broadband by adjusting requirements of the ReConnect program, which currently blocks rural communities across 19 states from accessing federal funding intended to support rural broadband deployment.

In the letter led by Senator Ron Wyden (D-OR), the senators request Secretary Perdue to use his authority to broaden ReConnect eligibility, reading:

*“USDA can, and should, fix this. USDA is neither statutorily required to eliminate FCC grant recipients from ReConnect eligibility, nor does it consider satellite service as sufficient broadband service for the purposes of awarding ReConnect funding,” **the senators wrote,** “[t]o rectify this inequity and further USDA’s stated goal of expanding broadband access for all Americans, we urge you to act to allow service providers to submit applications for ReConnect funds if the area has only received FCC auction funding for satellite service, but would otherwise be eligible.”*

Senator Baldwin has long fought for Washington to step up and be a stronger partner to rural communities by providing additional funding to help expand rural broadband access for communities across Wisconsin. In 2018, as a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, Baldwin helped [secure](#) \$600 million in new funding that created the ReConnect program to target areas that currently lack

access to broadband service.

ReConnect was established in 2018 and is authorized to provide grants and loans that foster rural broadband, but existing restrictions block service providers in areas that received Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Connect America Fund Phase II grants from applying for USDA ReConnect grants and 50/50 loan-grant combinations, even if only a satellite provider received funding for that area. The legislation that authorized the ReConnect program does not mandate such an exclusion.

As the senators highlighted in their letter, USDA considers satellite coverage insufficient for the needs of rural communities. Satellite service has much lower bandwidth caps, reliability and network speeds than fiber and fixed wireless services. This makes satellite service ill-suited for the telemedicine, mental health services and interactive distance learning applications that help rural communities thrive.

Joining Baldwin and Wyden on this letter are Senators John Barrasso (R-WY), Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Patty Murray (D-WA), Mike Enzi (R-WY), Doug Jones (D-AL), Tom Udall (D-NM) and Angus King (I-ME).

The full letter is available [here](#).

An online version of this release is available [here](#).

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