

July 10, 2023

**RE: Nebraska Broadband Bridge Program**

Public Service Commission –

We are pleased to offer our support for Nextlink’s application for Nebraska Broadband Bridge Program for the rural area south of Wymore, NE. This important project will help equip unserved rural areas of our county with broadband service that is necessary for life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Gage County is home to many local, national, and international businesses, employing thousands of residents in our nine-county region. These businesses rely on critical and public infrastructure for every aspect of their operations, including but not limited to natural gas, electricity, healthcare, and educational institutions, governmental services, and, of course, telecommunications. These companies have been feeling the effects of poor investment in broadband for a number of years and since the COVID-19 pandemic, those effects have been exacerbated. With the addition of automated machines to account for workforce shortages, remote work positions needing to stay “plugged in” to the office, and the increase in online sales and marketing, broadband is becoming even more critical to daily operations with many companies having nowhere to turn for solutions.

When schools were forced to close, districts throughout the area scrambled to ensure learning could continue at home but quickly realized that many homes were ill-equipped with the needed broadband connectivity to access lessons and Zoom calls. Similarly, when offices were closed for the safety of employees, workers found it difficult to work remotely, simply because they didn’t have reliable internet service. With the importance of meeting remotely, our hospital and public health systems needed to be able to connect with patients safely – a task made more difficult due to slow internet speeds or poor connections. The pandemic launched an entire society into a more digital world, with school students now more frequently utilizing digital learning, more people working from home, and healthcare patients receiving care from telehealth appointments, all of which are impossible without a broadband connection. It is no surprise that the COVID-19 pandemic exposed many areas in which communities are falling short and allowed us to see just how poor telecommunications are in rural Gage County and that it is directly hindering growth in our communities.

Broadband is essential for the vitality of Rural America, and it has been proven that investment in this infrastructure is directly correlated with greater economic growth, business attraction, people attraction and retention, and greater household incomes. If we want thriving communities, this is one critical piece that must be addressed and if any good came from a global pandemic, it’s that communities like ours have been spurred to action to ensure that we are equipped with technology suitable for 2023 and beyond.

Respectfully,



Rachel Kreikemeier  
Executive Director, NGage