

Ms. Wanda Manning

Digital Navigator

Delta Interfaith

East Carroll Parish, Louisiana

May 29, 2024

The Honorable Julia Letlow

U.S. House of Representatives

7932 Wrenwood Blvd

Baton Rouge, LA 70801

Dear Congresswoman Letlow,

My name is Wanda Manning. I'm a retired schoolteacher and lifelong resident of Lake Providence. I'm writing to ask for your support for Louisiana's broadband plan.

When COVID hit, I saw firsthand what you, as a former educator, know and described so well: "There is nothing like a pandemic to bring to light how vital rural broadband is to our district." My students couldn't attend class — not because they didn't want to, but because they had no way to connect. In 2020, our parish was ranked among the worst in the nation for internet. Families were paying \$150 for dial-up. Some were driving miles to find a Wi-Fi signal. Our children fell further behind through no fault of their own.

So we got organized. Through our churches and Delta Interfaith, we formed a broadband taskforce. We partnered with a rural provider and helped secure a GUMBO grant to bring fiber to our most remote residents. And when Louisiana's final BEAD plan included an award to finish the job in Lake Providence, we could see the finish line.

But now, everything's on hold. The state is ready. Our provider is ready. We're ready. But months have passed and NTIA still hasn't approved Louisiana's plan. We were the first state in the country to submit. Louisiana's done everything right. So why are we being asked to wait — or worse, start over?

Our students' education is still suffering. Parents tell me their kids can't keep up with homework because they don't have reliable internet at home.

It's not just about education. It's jobs, it's healthcare, it's opportunity. As a digital navigator, I've helped neighbors get remote work with companies like Apple — with good pay and real benefits. I've seen telehealth save people the 70-minute drive to a doctor. I've even seen families move back to the parish. But much of East Carroll still can't get online.

What's at stake goes far beyond our parish. Louisiana's GUMBO 2.0 plan would bring \$1.3 billion to connect over 140,000 homes and businesses — including over \$400 million in your district. All we need is the green light from Washington.

We are so close. We can see the wires — the fiber cables stop just at the edge of town. And the workers are ready to hook us up.

Congresswoman, will you speak up for us so we can all move forward?

Before you head back to DC, will you meet with our broadband taskforce along with the local construction companies, and Louisiana's broadband office? We want to work together with private business, our state offices, and you to make this project happen. This is a huge opportunity for our community.

People here believed this administration would deliver for rural America. That it would cut red tape, not bury us in it. We need your voice in Washington to help make that promise real.

Tell DC to let Louisiana build — and we'll make sure Lake Providence is the first to light up a GUMBO 2.0 network.

Sincerely,
Wanda Manning
Retired Teacher, Digital Navigator
East Carroll Parish, Louisiana