

Southside Network Authority

SUSAN VITALE, CHAIR
ANDRIA P. McCLELLAN, VICE-CHAIR

MEMBER
JURISDICTIONS

January 21, 2022

Honorable Members of the General Assembly
House Committee for Communications, Technology and Innovation

RE: HB 249 - Virginia Telecommunications Initiative – Eligibility

CHESAPEAKE

Dear Honorable Members of the General Assembly:

The Southside Network Authority is a partnership between the Cities of Chesapeake, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Suffolk, and Virginia Beach. Its initial project is to build a 119-mile fiber connectivity ring, which is designed as middle-mile service. The Authority is currently in the process of finalizing and hopefully shortly closing on funding and a construction contract for the ring. We are also in negotiations with a firm that wishes to commercialize the ring with last-mile service. Our facilities are expected to drive the market to make internet in the Southside cheaper, faster, and more accessible and responsive to the needs of less-privileged communities, economic development and community development needs and trends, and our health-care institutions and institutions of higher education.

NORFOLK

PORTSMOUTH

Last year, we were preemptively told that we would not be eligible for funding from the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) Virginia Telecommunications Initiative (VATI). We met with VATI officials on several occasions to discuss ways that the project could fit into VATI guidelines, but ultimately were told it was not worth our time to apply. We were told that unless the Authority had already identified a last-mile, private partner, our project could not be eligible for VATI funds. However, our project is focused on one of the key insights of ARPA—that lack of affordability and quality (i.e., speed and customer service) are lack of availability. This is a reality that the VATI has never acknowledged, but the Southside lives it and the U.S. Congress has seen us doing it.

SUFFOLK

We hope that the General Assembly will enable the VATI program to help us truly fulfill the goals that the U.S. Congress set for the use of the ARPA funds with the second tranche of funds that will become available next year.

VIRGINIA BEACH

Sincerely,



Steven H. DeBerry
Executive Director

SHD/ka

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