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November 16, 2021

The Honorable Governor Walz
130 State Capitol
75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Governor Walz,

AARP Minnesota appreciates your leadership and continued vigilance as the coronavirus landscape shifts and your readiness to take action to protect our most vulnerable residents.

I am writing today on behalf of our 640,000 members and all 50-plus Minnesotans about the need to prioritize older adults' needs in plans to allocate federal American Rescue Program Act (ARPA) funds and new infrastructure funding including those related to expanding access to affordable, reliable high-speed internet service, also known as broadband.

AARP is pleased to learn that the Office of Broadband Development will apply for additional funds through the Capital Projects Fund (CPF) due on December 27th, and urge you to ensure that Minnesota's plan addresses access barriers that impede older adults' ability to fully utilize broadband service. Such efforts can include:

- prioritizing network deployment in unserved and underserved communities where older adults are concentrated.
- acquiring equipment and the construction of community facilities – both eligible activities within CPF – that prioritize distribution of devices to older adults and invest in community centers that are convenient to older residents.

While CPF represents an important and timely opportunity, AARP Minnesota also encourages that ARPA funds and new infrastructure funding be used to support broadband deployment; enhance and strengthen mapping efforts to support better decision-making; reduce the cost for consumers (particularly low-income older consumers) to access internet service; and strengthen efforts to build the “digital literacy” of Minnesotans that have heretofore been left behind.



There is no longer any doubt about the critical importance of broadband access. The pandemic has exposed how Minnesotans without access to affordable high-speed internet are at a disadvantage when it comes to combatting isolation, scheduling vaccine appointments, accessing telehealth services, and much more. Yet, AARP's own research indicates that older Americans' access to affordable and convenient broadband connections continues to lag behind other age groups. AARP studies show that 15% of adults 50+ do not have access to any type of internet, and 60% say the cost of high-speed internet is a problem.

ARPA – and the Capital Projects Fund, in particular – provides critical opportunities to address these gaps, and we urge you to prioritize older adults' needs in plans to allocate those funds. We would like to thank you again for your service to our state and for your leadership during these challenging times. AARP Minnesota is committed to working with you and the Age-Friendly Minnesota Council to make these critical improvements.

If you have questions or wish to discuss this matter further, please contact me at cmcleer@aarp.org or AARP Advocacy's Director, Mary Jo George, at mgeorge@aarp.org or 651 271-6586.

Sincerely,



Cathy McLeer
State Director
AARP Minnesota

Cc: Commissioner Steve Grove, DEED

Sherrie Pugh, Council Chair, Age-Friendly Minnesota