



## Santa Fe Indian School

My name is Kimball Sekaquaptewa, please call me Kimball, from the Hopi Tribe of Arizona and a mother to three children of the Pueblo de Cochiti. I am joining you here today from Santa Fe, New Mexico. Please note that while I share a tribal experience, it is largely a rural experience. It is well-known that New Mexico is one of the least connected states in the country in large part due to the rugged and rocky terrain and sparse population density, resulting in extremely high construction costs with limited return on investment. In fact, in my home community, the wireline ISP offerings have not changed in 20 years, in short there are none. Until I built my first fiber optic backbone in 2018, the entire tribal government and public library shared a bonded T1 of 3.0 Mbps. As the Chief Technology Director for the Santa Fe Indian School it was my duty to provide Internet connectivity to our students who we sent home abruptly in March 2020 with the onset of COVID-19 to 23 rural tribal communities, who we know to be the least connected lands in the United States. In fact, in a survey of families, we learned that 89% of our students did *not* have Internet Access that met the FCC performance benchmark of 25/3.

If there was a silver lining it was that we could build on previous efforts. Leveraging the FCC Schools and Libraries E-rate, I led a consortium of tribal schools and libraries to bring high speed affordable Internet into six Pueblo communities. Our goal was to provide our Pueblo students the same college and career opportunities as their more affluent urban peers. Our tribal leaders realized that our work reached beyond education and invested private funds to add broadband infrastructure for improved governance, health, and environmental protection. With their existing fiber backhaul, it was these communities who were able to pivot and deploy residential internet access during the pandemic.

Fast forward to 2022, the collaborations continue. Thanks to a NTIA Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program grant, the Santa Fe Indian School is constructing a 324-mile route to three more Pueblos and remote tribal lands. I can't understate the importance of this historic tribal broadband opportunity. The program springboards tribal efforts to connect the unserved homes and anchor institutions to be our own solution to the digital divide. In total, we will have placed 500 miles of middle-mile fiber in New Mexico and these connections are equally as important for the State of New Mexico, as for the tribes themselves. Given the NTIA open network requirements, private industry will not have to bear expensive costs to build these

routes and will have access to fiber backhaul to improve and extend their last-mile networks. Thinking of tribes as partners and not just recipients of service, is a paradigm shift to solve rural connectivity in all states with tribal nations. For too long, providers have built around sovereign lands, when in fact, we are the critical partners and hold the skills to achieve right-of-way and permitting requirements.

Looking ahead, the financial sustainability of emerging tribal networks is paramount. While the grants provide the capital funding, operations and management require on-going support. Our Tribal ISPs are increasingly participating in the Affordable Connectivity Program as providers but the future of this program is uncertain. Alternatively, FCC could provide a pathway for emerging ISPs to access Lifeline through a broadband only ETC designation.

As Chair of the Connect New Mexico Council, we steward broadband infrastructure deployment to connect every New Mexican. The passage of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program we have a generational opportunity create a connected nation. In New Mexico, we have implemented a pilot grant similar to the BEAD NOFO requirements. While local governments are eligible grantees, functionally they are challenged to participate given the stringent requirements for matching funds, letters of credit, and professional engineering stamps. These requirements favor better resourced ISPs, who will apply to serve their next best markets. As a nation, we run the risk of replicating the status quo and missing the most underserved communities. The rush to use the FCC Fabric map, compounds the issue. In New Mexico, we estimate that the Fabric is missing tens of thousands of eligible serviceable locations, losing up to \$500M in the funding allocation. We ask that NTIA extend the January 13, 2023 deadline to submit challenges to the FCC's preliminary broadband map.

Lastly, I submit the solution to bridge the digital divide in the United States does not lie in a methodology limited to a conventional ISP approach. In that I refer to a broader broadband ecosystem. For instance, only half of the country has a state education network. Yet the development of state education networks has the ancillary benefit of installing middle-mile infrastructure for an entire state. However, our methodology to realize creative strategies must match, for example if anchor institutions were service eligible locations on the Fabric, we could then more easily design and fund such solutions. Uplifting these corollary broadband efforts is a holistic approach to then serve homes.

Thank you hearing my contributions to ensure solutions to meet America's broadband needs.