

## Questions for the Record

### **U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation**

*“Nomination of Leslie B. Kiernan to be General Counsel of the Department of Commerce”*

April 21, 2021

### **Questions for the Record from the Hon. Raphael Warnock to Ms. Leslie Kiernan**

**Broadband Expansion.** Expanding access to broadband, especially in rural and low-income communities, is a major issue for Georgia businesses and households. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the critical importance of broadband service with students now engaging in virtual and distance learning, parents working remotely, and seniors and rural Georgians relying on telemedicine for medical services. Without access to broadband, students are falling behind in classrooms, and Georgia residents are disconnected from jobs and economic opportunities. In 2020, the Georgia Department of Community Affairs found that more than 500,000 residential and business locations did not have access to broadband, 70 percent of which are in rural areas.

*Question.* Ms. Kiernan, what steps would you take as General Counsel of the Department of Commerce to ensure the Department supports the deployment of broadband to these unserved areas through the National Telecommunication and Information Administration or otherwise?

*Answer.*

If confirmed, I look forward to working with NTIA to help ensure that federal funds are targeted to eligible areas across the country, including Georgia. It is my understanding that NTIA is currently working to leverage its National Broadband Availability Map (NBAM), which counts Georgia as a partner, to identify underserved and unserved areas. The NBAM is a geographic information system (GIS) platform for data collection, visualization, and analysis of federal, state, and commercially available data sets to assist federal and state broadband policymakers to identify discrepancies in broadband availability (e.g. served vs. underserved or unserved areas) that can be used to better inform policy and funding decisions. It includes three data layers provided by the Georgia Broadband Deployment Initiative (GBDI), managed by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, which you referenced in your question.

I also understand that Georgia is an active participant in the State Broadband Leaders Network (SBLN), a cohort of state leaders facilitated by NTIA, which currently includes 5 participants from the state of Georgia: three participants from the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, one from the Georgia Technology Authority, and one from the Georgia Department of Transportation.

If confirmed as General Counsel, it will be a priority to ensure these programs are implemented effectively and efficiently.