

# Yellowstone County



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October 24, 2023

Dear Director Giles,

The Yellowstone County Commission is committed to promoting growth, innovation, and equal opportunity for all of our constituents. Through our work, we focus on ensuring local and state leaders are responsible stewards of the resources available to our county and other Montana communities. By exercising this responsibility to the best of our ability, we can make sure the residents of Montana's largest county have everything they need to succeed.

Chief among the resources we are working to secure is access to quality and reliable broadband, something that has become much more important in today's digital world. Thanks to the Broadband Equity Access and Deployment (BEAD) Program, we have the opportunity to close our digital divide and ensure anyone who wants broadband can access it. This will be crucial for telehealth, schooling, and business development opportunities.

Montana is using the ConnectMT program to facilitate the distribution of \$629 million in BEAD funding, and we're excited about the prospect of improved broadband coming to Yellowstone County. However, upon inspection of the program rules, we noticed that Montana will be enforcing fixed price requirements for various speed tiers on program applicants. In our view, there is no reason to introduce this strict price setting into the equation because so many providers already proactively offer quality service at accessible prices.

For the ConnectMT program to be successful, we must cast a wide net and not discourage providers from participating in this crucial program. Enforcing a rate regulation when many providers are already offering affordable prices may make some internet providers choose not to apply. Not to mention the fact that the regulation would score two vastly different speed tiers similarly, meaning providers would be forced to offer their highest speeds at unsustainably low prices.

Rate regulation threatens to stifle competition and reduce participation in the BEAD program. We urge you to not move forward with this provision and instead adopt rules that will bring the best providers to the table.

Thank you for your dedication and hard work in closing our digital divide.

Sincerely,

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
YELLOWSTONE COUNTY, MONTANA

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Mark Morse, Member

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Donald W. Jones, Member