



**John Vanthof**

MPP/député Timiskaming-Cochrane



To the Mayors, Reeves & Councils of Timiskaming-Cochrane

Nov. 6, 2020

RE: **Bill 226 -The Broadband is an Essential Service Act**

As you are well aware, lack of access to usable and affordable high-speed internet has been a long-standing barrier for many residents and businesses in the riding of Timiskaming-Cochrane. Cities, towns, townships, villages and unorganized areas in our region have expressed concern to the Government and myself regarding the loss of social and economic advancement in our communities and our region due to lack of access. Because of those concerns, I moved a motion in the legislature in 2018 requesting the creation of a \$1 billion dollar, 10-year rural broadband strategy to ensure broadband connectivity for users throughout rural Ontario. The motion passed unanimously and the Government committed to a \$350 million dollar program over 10 years.

With the arrival of the COVID 19 pandemic, the access barrier suddenly became a crisis for many families in rural Ontario. In the 2019/20 budget, \$31 million out of the original \$350 million had been committed to rural broadband investment but none of those dollars flowed to projects. Since budget funding does not carry over into the next budget year, it was an unfortunate loss for a sector so desperate for infrastructure dollars. Another issue that surfaced involved funding earmarked for rural broadband infrastructure that did not appear to be attached to an overall strategy to ensure everyone gets service.

As a result, I tabled the **Broadband is an Essential Service Act** (Bill 226) which would legislate the provincial government to develop and implement a high speed internet strategy that ensures 95% of Ontarians have access by 2026, and the other 5% by 2030. The Minister of Infrastructure would have to report on and update the strategy to ensure its completion. The specifications for the service would be determined by the CRTC.

Since tabling Bill 226, the government has introduced their second budget. It contains a further \$630 million dollar commitment for rural broadband. This is welcome news for rural residents but the original issues are still evident so implementation of the **Broadband is an Essential Service Act** is paramount.

The government has committed to the almost billion dollars identified by the NDP as needed to upgrade the services. The Government needs to commit that the program's completion will ensure all Ontarians have affordable access to high-speed internet.

I ask for your support of **Bill 226- the Broadband is an Essential Service Act** - which will be debated for second reading on November 26, 2020.

Sincerely,

John Vanthof,  
MPP Timiskaming-Cochrane

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