



BARRY GLASSMAN

HARFORD COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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Harford County Executive Glassman Statement on Armstrong Decision to Withdraw from Grant Application for Rural Broadband

BEL AIR, Md., (March 13, 2020) In an effort to expand internet service in its rural northern region, Harford County partnered with Armstrong to apply for a federal grant under the USDA ReConnect Program for Broadband Funding. This USDA grant could have provided funding to assist internet provider Armstrong in reaching 1,400 additional customers at an estimated cost of \$12 million over five years. On February 28, Armstrong informed county government they would withdraw from their commitment to apply for the grant.

Armstrong said that other plans and obligations, unrelated to Harford County, led to their decision, but they would still proceed with a scheduled upgrade and expansion in the area that will add a small number of homes to their coverage.

Harford County Executive Barry Glassman issued the following statement in response to Armstrong's decision:

"While I am disappointed that Armstrong has made the decision to not submit their application for the USDA ReConnect program grant after all of the work we've done on their behalf, we will continue our efforts to identify funding sources and partners that can provide broadband connectivity to our County's unserved rural areas."

Internet access is so important to our daily lives today – for doing our jobs, for running our businesses, for allowing our kids to complete their school assignments, and for staying connected to the outside world. During this time when we are facing a threat to public health and when we may be urged to stay at home as much as possible, the lack of connectivity becomes even more of a burden for so many.

Although it's not the role of local government to be an internet service provider, we will continue to develop a feasible solution to make broadband access a reality for our rural citizens."

Harford County government could not apply for the federal USDA grant on its own, as a recipient is required to own and operate the funded network as an ISP, which is a costly and historically unsuccessful venture for local governments. Harford County will be reimbursed by a state grant for all costs associated with the highly technical grant application, which was prepared by consultants CTC Energy & Technology.

The USDA grant was only part of the Glassman administration's effort to extend broadband north to a total of 1,683 unserved residential and business customers. The administration has tasked consultants CTC with developing options moving forward to bring broadband or fixed wireless service to these customers. The CTC report is due next week.

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