



## **For Immediate Release**

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## **Van Buren County Potential Beneficiary of State of Michigan Broadband Funding**

**Paw Paw, Michigan, June 21, 2021** – The Michigan High-Speed Internet Office announced its initial recommendations for the [Realizing Opportunity with Broadband Infrastructure Networks](#) (ROBIN) program on June 20, 2023. This program will potentially bring reliable, high-speed broadband service to over 6,300 residents and businesses in Van Buren County, 3,476 of which currently lack access.

Midwest Energy & Communications (MEC) submitted a \$56.4 million application for ROBIN funding to expand internet service in Berrien, Cass, St. Joseph, and Van Buren counties. The application included a \$15.5 million investment from MEC and requested \$27.6 million from the State. Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren Counties, along with townships and villages in the proposed counties committed over \$13 million.

If granted the full award, MEC will bring fiber internet to rural areas in Van Buren County. This would include approximately 92% of the homes in Van Buren County that currently lack access to high-speed internet. If fully awarded, the County will commit over \$4.1 million, and 12 townships will commit nearly \$1.4 million. MEC will begin construction in the fall of 2023 and will finish by the end of 2026. Customers will get activated once construction in their specific area is complete, and those exact plans have yet to be determined.

The ROBIN program now enters a 45-day objection period, and final awards will be determined after objections have been validated. The State expects to make final award announcements in August 2023 and stresses that not all applications will receive full funding due to the objections.

MEC is a rural electric cooperative, propane supplier, and internet service provider headquartered in Cassopolis, Michigan serving customers in Michigan and northern Indiana and Ohio.

"At MEC, we are committed to eliminating the digital divide in rural Michigan. We could not have done this without the support of Van Buren County and participating townships. They worked tirelessly to secure financial commitments to help make high-speed broadband a reality in their areas," said MEC President/CEO Bob Hance.

Randall Peat, Chair Van Buren County Board of Commissioners, commented: "Van Buren County is grateful for the partnerships that have made this opportunity possible. Getting to this point required MEC buying into the County's strategy for internet expansion, the provision of matching funds by several townships, coordination and advocacy by Market Van Buren and leadership by DCS Technology Design. Together, we now have a chance to bring affordable, reliable high-speed internet access to roughly 3,500 homes and encourage long-term, sustainable economic growth in our county."

The following townships committed matching funds to enhance MEC's competitiveness for grant funding: Almena, Antwerp, Bangor, Covert, Decatur, Hamilton, Hartford, Keeler, Lawrence, Paw Paw, Porter, and South Haven.

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