



# **Manar Announces \$4.2 million Broadband Expansion Grant For Macoupin, Northern Madison Counties**

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**STAUNTON** - Approximately 9,283 businesses, farms, households, and other institutions in Macoupin and Madison Counties will gain or see improved access to high-speed internet with the help of a \$4.2 million broadband expansion grant to Staunton-based Madison Communications, Inc. announced today by Governor JB Pritzker and State Senator Andy Manar (D-Bunker Hill).

These funds are being released as part of Connect Illinois, the governor's plan to bring basic access to every community in the state by 2024. This plan aims to improve access through an unprecedented capital investment and with the nation's largest grant matching program.

"High speed internet is an absolute necessity for economic growth and our ability to deliver high-quality education and health care. For rural families and businesses, the effects of the digital divide have been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic," Manar said. "Bold investments in broadband expansion under the Connect Illinois plan are the most impactful steps we can take to strengthen economic viability and secure a promising future for rural communities like those in Macoupin and northern Madison Counties. I appreciate the Pritzker administration's commitment to closing this disparity in all corners of our state."

Marking the first round of Connect Illinois grants, the \$50 million in total investments announced today will be matched by \$65 million in non-state funds to support 28 projects across Illinois. They are expected to expand internet access to more than 26,000 homes, businesses, farms, and community institutions.

"Connect Illinois is about the right of all our communities to access health care, education, and economic opportunity – because in the 21st century, all those rights are tied to digital connectivity," Pritzker said. "The unacceptable consequences of disparities in broadband access were clear before the COVID-19 pandemic – and over the last few months, we've seen firsthand what it means when a small business that had to close its doors has no online shop, what it means when an elderly couple has no safe way to get medical advice at a distance, what it means when a child has no ability to access homework assignments online. This work has never been more urgent – the disadvantages that persist when our communities are left out of opportunity demand ambitious efforts to bring them to a close."

The Connect Illinois plan responds to the needs of key industries and business sectors that lack reliable, affordable internet access due to a number of factors, including their location. Farm and agriculture is one of those sectors – with an estimated 40% of farmers in Illinois underserved or completely unserved by reliable internet access.

The state's largest-ever broadband expansion initiative, Connect Illinois includes a \$400 million broadband grant program and a \$20 million capital program for the Illinois Century Network, a high-speed broadband network serving K-12 and higher education institutions, among others.

Another round of Connect Illinois grants is expected to be released later this year. More information on these and other grant programs can be found on DCEO's website.