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For Immediate Release

NEBRASKA ASSOCIATION WORKS TO IMPROVE BROADBAND BY CLOSING DIGITAL DIVIDE

STATEWIDE-The Nebraska Regional Officials Council (NROC) announces the launch of a statewide broadband mapping initiative. Every Nebraskan is encouraged to partake in the one-minute speed test from any internet-enabled device, including cell phones. Speed data will provide decision makers a better understanding of where internet accessibility is limited or not available, and where speeds are not meeting the needs of today's users.

The purpose of this initiative is to bridge the digital divide between urban and rural areas. The captured information will provide statistically sound data that can be used by communities, counties, and key stakeholders as they plan for broadband infrastructure expansion or enhancement projects.

"Results from this study will give local and state officials a better understanding of where underserved and unserved Nebraska residents are," NROC's President CJ Poltack noted. "Furthermore, it will allow the state to align with Governor Rickett's legislative priority of improving broadband services for the entire state."

Individuals are encouraged to take the free test at <https://www.speedtestne.org>. Participation by everyone is essential. No personal information will be collected. Repeated speed tests by the same users are encouraged during the two-year initiative in order to better capture variations in internet speeds and collect more statistically valid data.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the need for broadband accessibility with students remote learning and employees working from home. NROC's initiative will explore how these demands are affecting current providers' speeds and find gaps in service.

"I would like to encourage Nebraskans to participate in this initiative," said Ed Toner, CIO for the State of Nebraska and Chair of the Rural Broadband Task Force. "Speed test data can help identify areas which lack broadband so strategies and funding to connect these areas can be identified."

Collected data will provide the most comprehensive, validated, real-time reporting of actual upload and download speeds recorded in the state. The study will be conducted by GEO Partners, LLC – an independent, broadband data collection and analysis firm with extensive expertise, and not affiliated with any internet service providers (ISPs).

This project is funded through a U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) CARES Act grant specifically to address recovery and resiliency efforts for all affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

NROC is the state organization of Nebraska Development Districts and has been a strong advocate for broadband expansion across the region. NROC and regional partnering organizations recognize that high speed quality broadband is a critical utility to economic development, education, business, emergency management and emergency services, and virtual healthcare.

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