



## Remarks by Rural Development Under Secretary Dallas Tonsager; Announce Distance Learning and Telemedicine Award at the Eastern Maine Medical Center

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Good afternoon! It's wonderful to be here in Bangor with everyone from Eastern Maine Medical Center, with our funding partners at the Forest Service, and with Maine's Rural Development State Director, Virginia Manuel, who I know has been working hard along with her staff to make this happen. And, of course, I'm pleased to be able to speak to all of you in Fort Kent at Northern Maine Medical Center about the \$6.7 million in funding you're receiving for a project to reduce energy costs....

**And especially pleased** because I can speak to you remotely using advanced technology. This application is a product of this Administration's commitment to improving healthcare across the country—all made possible through everyone's hard work and by our Distance Learning and Telemedicine program at USDA Rural Development.

Our DLT program is a fantastic program, and an excellent source of capital to bring telemedicine services to rural communities. Applicants can compete for grant funding for the purchase of end-user telecommunications equipment, which facilitates real-time health care for rural patients by medical doctors or specialists located in larger hospital facilities. Telemedicine technology can save lives by eliminating the barriers of time and distance that often challenge rural health care.

Secretary Vilsack and I have been keeping a close eye on the amazing life-changing and life-saving projects across the country. I've heard, for instance, about how right here at Eastern Maine Medical Center, the center's Critical Care Connection provides real-time health care service to rural patients using advanced audio-visual telecommunications equipment.

Our Administrator for our Rural Utilities Service relayed a story to me about how **this hospital was able to use video technology to evaluate a newborn**, who they then decided needed to be flown to a hospital in Boston. That evaluation via video technology saved them precious hours that would've otherwise been spent waiting to see a doctor in person. Instead, they were able to immediately identify the treatment needs of this newborn and get him the care that was needed. **Those are the kinds of stories I and the Secretary love to hear.**

Since 2009, Rural Development has invested \$11 million right here in Maine on DLT. This funding is a wonderful complement to all that we have been able to provide through our Community Facilities Program, part of Rural Development's Rural Housing Service. Together, we are well positioned to help rural health care facilities provide world-class service to rural residents.

The Community Facilities Program supports essential infrastructure and services for public use in rural areas of 20,000 people or less. Financing for Community Facilities projects covers a broad range of interests, including healthcare, education, public safety, and public services. Since the start of the Obama Administration, Rural Development's Community Facilities Program has helped nearly 30 million rural Americans address essential challenges in health care, education, public service and public safety by financing projects through loans, grants, or loan guarantees.

**Since the start of the Obama Administration, Rural Development has helped finance more than:**

- 580 health care projects, with loans and grants totaling *\$1.8 billion*
- 825 public service projects, with loans and grants totaling *\$679 million*
- 950 education projects, with loans and grants totaling *\$672 million*

- 2,190 public safety projects, with loans and grants totaling *\$458 million*

**In Maine alone, we've invested over \$38 million through our Community Facilities Program since 2009.**

Just last week, we released a new report highlighting how our Community Facilities program creates jobs and boosts economic development. We also announced over \$45 million in new Community Facilities projects, including hospital and clinic construction. All this highlights what is possible through public-private partnerships that allow us to better support our rural health care providers in meeting patients' needs in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**It's great to see projects like the one we are announcing today for Northern Maine Medical Center.** A \$6.7 Million dollar guaranteed loan will allow them to replace an outdated heating system with a wood-chip biomass boiler system and refinance existing debt. The new boiler will replace 3 boilers that are 50+ years old, and the restructuring will put Northern Maine Medical Center on firmer financial footing going forward, improving cash flow.

**Loans like this one play a vital role** in ensuring that rural communities can compete in today's economy by providing the tools and services necessary to attract and sustain economic growth.

At USDA, we recognize the importance of increasing the availability of capital for community facilities and infrastructure investments. All this is essential for small towns and rural areas to attract new businesses, spur growth and create jobs.

I want to thank you again for joining us all today to recognize yet another small, but important step in the right direction that we are making with this project.