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October 5, 2026

The Honorable Sean Duffy
Secretary, U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, S.E.
Washington, DC 20590

Re: Madison Street Bridge Expansion Project - Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-saving Transportation (PROTECT) Grant Application

Dear Secretary Duffy:

This letter is to express the strong support of Columbus County Partnership for Children for the North Carolina Department of Transportation's Madison Street Bridge Expansion project in the City of Whiteville, Columbus County, North Carolina. The project will improve the Madison Street (US 701 Business) crossing over Soules Swamp by extending the existing bridge and adding a second bridge. These improvements will help the roadway to better handle heavy rainfall and flooding events, keeping this important connection open for residents, businesses, emergency responders and travelers.

Flooding is a recurring issue along Madison Street and throughout downtown Whiteville during heavy rainfall events. Improving the bridge crossing would reduce flooding in the area and allow rainwater to recede more quickly after heavy rainfall events. As a result, the project would help reduce road closures, improve access to downtown Whiteville, and provide more reliable travel for all roadway users during and after heavy rainfall events.

Columbus County Partnership for Children has experienced significant flooding on two separate occasions in the past. We have lost furnishings, equipment, files, important records, books and other resources that allow us to serve the children and families in our community.

For **Columbus County Partnership for Children**, the importance of the Madison Street Bridge Expansion project can be summarized by the following:

- Madison Street is a critical transportation corridor for families, children, early childhood educators, childcare providers, healthcare professionals, and community partners who access services and programs throughout Whiteville.

"Guarantee the future of Columbus County by investing in its children"

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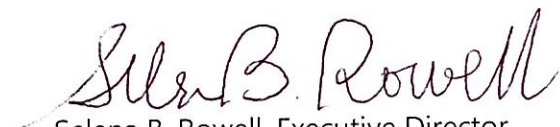


- Recurring flooding and road closures along Madison Street and the downtown area of Whiteville disrupt access to essential services for young children and families, including early childhood education programs, family support services, developmental screenings, health appointments, and other resources that are vital to school readiness and healthy child development.
- Reliable transportation routes are essential for the Partnership's staff, board members, service providers, and community partners who travel throughout the county to support children and families. Delays caused by flooding can affect program delivery, attendance at meetings, training opportunities, and timely access to services.
- The project would provide more dependable access to downtown Whiteville, where many agencies and organizations work collaboratively to serve families. Improved connectivity would strengthen coordination among education, health, and social service providers.
- During severe weather events and emergency situations, maintaining access across Madison Street is vital for emergency responders, healthcare providers, and families seeking assistance. The project would enhance community resilience and improve access to critical services when they are needed most.
- Thousands of children and families across Columbus County benefit directly and indirectly from the programs, services, and partnerships supported by Columbus County Partnership for Children. Ensuring reliable access to Whiteville's transportation network helps these families reach educational opportunities, childcare programs, healthcare services, and community resources without unnecessary interruption.
- By reducing flooding-related disruptions, the project would support economic stability for working families who rely on dependable transportation to access employment, childcare, and essential services, ultimately contributing to a stronger and more resilient community.

The Madison Street Bridge Expansion project represents an important investment in public safety, transportation reliability, and the long-term resilience of our community. Columbus County Partnership for Children strongly supports this project and its potential to enhance access to essential services, improve emergency response capabilities, and strengthen the quality of life for residents throughout Columbus County.

Thank you for your consideration of this important infrastructure improvement.

Sincerely,



Selena B. Rowell, Executive Director
Columbus County Partnership for Children