



PUBLIC NOTICE

Federal Communications Commission
445 12th St., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

News Media Information 202 / 418-0500
Internet: <https://www.fcc.gov>
TTY: 1-888-835-5322

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WIRELINE COMPETITION BUREAU EXTENDS THE COVID-19 TELEHEALTH PROGRAM SEPTEMBER 30, 2020 PURCHASE AND IMPLEMENTATION DEADLINE

WC Docket No. 20-89

By this Public Notice, the Wireline Competition Bureau (Bureau) extends from September 30, 2020 to December 31, 2020, the deadline for COVID-19 Telehealth Program (COVID-19 Program) funding recipients to purchase eligible devices and implement eligible services. This extension provides COVID-19 Program funding recipients additional time to purchase eligible items to provide telehealth services to address the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

As part of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES), Congress appropriated \$200 million to the Federal Communications Commission (Commission) “to support efforts of health care providers to address coronavirus by providing telecommunications services, information services, and devices necessary to enable the provision of telehealth services.”¹ On April 2, 2020, the Commission established the COVID-19 Program to administer the \$200 million in congressionally appropriated funding.² The Commission issued funding awards for 539 applications from April 16, 2020 until July 8, 2020, when the appropriated \$200 million budget was exhausted.³

Pursuant to Bureau guidance, COVID-19 Program funding recipients were given a September 30, 2020 deadline (purchase/implementation deadline) to purchase eligible devices and implement eligible services.⁴ To date, the Bureau has received multiple requests to extend the purchase/implementation deadline for the COVID-19 Program. Participants needing more time have cited reasons including the length of time needed to complete procurement steps required by the state, and procurement or implementation delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic or by recent hurricane damage.⁵ The

¹ Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, Pub. L. No 116-136, 134 Stat. 281 (2020) (CARES Act).

² *Promoting Telehealth for Low-Income Consumers; COVID-19 Telehealth Program*, WC Docket Nos. 18-213, 20-89, Report and Order, 35 FCC Rcd 3366, 3375-84, paras. 15-36 (2020) (*Report and Order*).

³ Federal Communications Commission, Press Release, *FCC Approves Final Set of Covid-19 Telehealth Program Applications* (July 8, 2020), <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DOC-365417A1.pdf>.

⁴ *Wireline Competition Bureau and Office of Managing Director Provide Invoicing Guidance for the COVID-19 Telehealth Program*, WC Docket No. 20-89, Public Notice, 35 FCC Rcd 3564 (WCB Apr. 17, 2020); Wireline Competition Bureau, *COVID-19 Telehealth Program – Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)*, (last updated June 29, 2020), <https://www.fcc.gov/covid-19-telehealth-program-frequently-asked-questions-faqs> (COVID-19 FAQs). This deadline was also provided in the Funding Commitment Letters that the Bureau issued to funding recipients.

Bureau anticipates that other funding recipients may experience difficulty meeting the September 30, 2020 purchase/implementation deadline for similar reasons. Based on the number of extension requests the Bureau has received and the continuing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Bureau believes that extending the purchase/implementation deadline until December 31, 2020 for all COVID-19 Telehealth Program funding recipients is reasonable under the circumstances and is also consistent with the purpose of the CARES Act.⁶ While the Bureau extends the purchase/implementation deadline to December 31, 2020, we encourage COVID-19 Telehealth Program funding recipients to purchase eligible devices and implement eligible services lists as soon as practicable.

Additional Information. For further information regarding this Public Notice, please contact Rashann Duvall, Attorney-Advisor, Telecommunications Access Policy Division, Wireline Competition Bureau, rashann.duvall@fcc.gov or (202) 418-1438. For more information about the COVID-19 Telehealth Program, refer to the Commission's website at www.fcc.gov/covid19telehealth.

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⁵ See E-mail from Monica VanDeWalle, Owner, The Write Choice Network, to Kenneth Hill, Attorney-Advisor, Consumer Inquiries and Complaints Division, Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau, (Aug. 31, 2020) (explaining that hurricane Laura severely damaged the SWLA Center for Health Services and that it as well as COVID-19 has caused a delay in their ability to meet the eligible services implementation deadline); E-mail from Dr. Karen Rheuban, University of Virginia, to Rashann Duvall, Attorney-Advisor, Telecommunications Access Policy Division, Wireline Competition Bureau (Sept. 8, 2020) (explaining that COVID-19 has delayed the implementation of eligible services); E-mail from Kevin Muir, Executive Director, EngageWell IPA, to Rashann Duvall, Attorney-Advisor, Telecommunications Access Policy Division, Wireline Competition Bureau (Sept. 15, 2020) (explaining that COVID-19 has caused ExpressWell IPA to experience significant cash flow issues, lay-offs and furloughs, and difficulty with sourcing vendors for phones); Letters from Mae-Gilene Begay, Navajo Nation Department of Health, to Rashann Duvall, Attorney-Advisor, Telecommunications Access Policy Division, Wireline Competition Bureau (Sept. 11 and 15, 2020) (explaining that the Department of Health was delayed with the procurement and acquisition process for eligible services and devices); E-mail from Nini Vidrine, Manager of Post Award, University of Louisiana of Lafayette, to Regina Brown, Attorney-Advisor, Wireline Competition Bureau (Sept. 17, 2020) (describing equipment and services procurement issues).

⁶ The extension of the purchase/implementation deadline does not entitle funding recipients to receive more than six months of support for eligible services with monthly recurring charges.