NEWS

This is an unofficial announcement of Commission action. Release of the full text of a Commission order constitutes official action.
See MCI v. FCC. 515 F 2d 385 (D.C. Circ 1974).

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
November 13, 2007

NEWS MEDIA CONTACTS:
Clyde Ensslin: 202-418-0506
clyde.ensslin@fcc.gov
Robert Kenny: 202-418-2668
robert.kenny@fcc.gov

FCC CHAIRMAN MARTIN DISCUSSES BENEFITS OF DEPLOYING BROADBAND TELEHEALTH NETWORKS IN RURAL AND UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES

Chairman Martin Joins Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Leavitt at Conference in Chicago to Highlight Key Points of FCC Rural Health Care Proposal

Washington, D.C. – Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Chairman Kevin J. Martin today announced a comprehensive proposal to fund a $400 million Rural Health Care Pilot Program (RHCPP) that would expand access to health care to America's rural and underserved communities through the creation of broadband telehealth networks in 42 states and three U.S. territories.

As part of today's announcement, Chairman Martin joined U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Michael O. Leavitt at a meeting of the American Health Information Community in Chicago to highlight key points of his rural health care proposal. Under this initiative, broadband deployment will support the efficient delivery of health care to patients through telemedicine. Facilitating telemedicine programs can reduce costs and travel time for consumers, help decrease medical errors, and enable health care providers to quickly share critical patient-care information electronically.

Chairman Martin said, "With this pilot program, the Commission will be taking a major step toward the goal of connecting health care facilities across the nation with one another through broadband telehealth networks for the benefit of patients. We look forward to working with Secretary Leavitt and HHS to advance initiatives that improve access to health care for patients through telemedicine and support the creation of a national system for interoperable electronic health records well into the future."

"I applaud the FCC's efforts to advance availability of broadband services in rural and underserved communities, especially among health care providers," HHS Secretary Leavitt said. "By advancing the broadband infrastructure needed to support health information technology, the FCC is moving us toward the President's goal of ensuring most Americans have access to interoperable electronic health records by 2014."

-more-

The health care facilities qualified to participate in this pilot program would utilize funding to leverage existing telehealth networks or build-out new, comprehensive systems for telehealth projects. RHCPP participants would be eligible for universal service funding to support up to 85 percent of the costs associated with the design, engineering and construction of innovative and highly efficient broadband systems.

Participants deploying dedicated broadband health care networks would also have the option of connecting those systems to the public internet as well as to one of the Nation's dedicated Internet backbones: Internet-2, National LambdaRail (NLR) or the public Internet. For more information on the Rural Health Care Pilot Program please visit the FCC's web site at: http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/rural/rhcp.html.

In addition, health care providers participating in the pilot program would be strongly encouraged to coordinate in the use of their telehealth networks with HHS and, in particular, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in instances of national, regional or local public health emergencies (e.g., bioterrorism events, pandemics or disease-related outbreaks). In such public health emergencies, selected participants would provide access to their supported networks to public health officials so that they could share critical, time-sensitive information and risk management guidance as part of a comprehensive response effort.

-FCC-

News and other information about the Federal Communications Commission
are available at www.fcc.gov.