

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 25, 2011

WCB
2011 Rural Health Care
LATA
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The Honorable Julius Genachowski
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Genachowski:

We write to you concerning the current need for affordable high capacity broadband services in the seven counties that comprise the Brazos Valley in Central Texas. Today health care providers in these rural communities do not have access to adequate and affordable high-capacity services necessary to deliver cost effective, quality health care to the rural and low-income residents of the area. With six separate Local Access and Transport Areas (LATA) boundaries dividing the region, both a lack of competitive pricing and a shortage of high-capacity services among existing rural carriers leave our health care providers and their patients in this area without access to state-of-the art diagnostic tools available at medical centers located in more urban centers of the state.

We understand the Federal Communications Commission (Commission) recently proposed reforms to the universal service health care support mechanism which includes a health infrastructure program to fund up to 85 percent of the eligible costs for the design, construction and deployment of dedicated broadband networks that connect non-profit health care providers in areas of the country where the existing broadband infrastructure is inadequate. We believe a properly designed and administered health infrastructure program, as proposed by the Commission, offers the most cost-effective way of bringing telemedicine benefits to the Brazos Valley.


The Brazos Valley Council of Governments has already created a non-profit entity, Brazos 2020 Vision, with the goal of providing affordable connections to health care facilities in the area. The Commission's proposed health infrastructure program will allow for a one-time investment to fund the construction of the Brazos 2020 Vision broadband health network through a competitive bidding process open to all, rather than rely on perpetual universal service subsidies to existing providers which has contributed to the increasing cost of the Universal Service Fund. For this reason, and in light of the critical health care needs of our rural areas, we strongly support the Commission's proposed health infrastructure funding.

Implementing the proposed health infrastructure program will provide our Brazos Valley Council of Governments the opportunity to move ahead with its plans to build high-speed, high capacity network between our hospitals, rural clinics, emergency medical services, nursing schools and other medical facilities. High speed connections between our rural health care

facilities will provide our rural residents access to cutting-edge medical technology that will deliver significant improvements to patient care, while also enabling the Brazos Valley to fully implement next generation 911, electronic health record requirements and other IP-based emergency technologies. Eventually, the investment made to deploy these networks will lead to increased broadband availability throughout our broader rural communities.

As the Commission considers the final components of its new Rural Health Care Program, we urge it be mindful of the infrastructure needs of our rural communities by including the health infrastructure program as proposed in its Notice of Proposed Rulemaking.

Sincerely,


Rep. Bill Flores


Rep. Joe Barton


Rep. Michael McCaul


Rep. John Carter