

## **FCC Consumer Advisory Committee Recommendation Regarding the Remote Areas Fund**

The Federal Communications Commission proposes to allocate \$100 million to a Remote Areas Fund that would “ensure that Americans living in the most remote areas in the nation, where the cost of deploying traditional terrestrial broadband networks is extremely high, can obtain affordable access through alternative technology platforms, including satellite and unlicensed wireless services.”<sup>1</sup>

The Consumer Advisory Committee (CAC) encourages the Commission to structure the Remote Areas Fund to enable municipal, community and local broadband providers to participate in the fund. Further, the CAC supports the position that there is a need for an interconnection obligation for fund recipients. The CAC further encourages the Commission to ensure that these municipal, community and local broadband providers ensure that their broadband services address the needs of and are accessible to people with disabilities.

- To ensure that consumers have access to the most robust available broadband service, the Commission should consider the potential effectiveness of municipal, community and local broadband providers. Smaller, community-driven networks such as community wireless networks and WISPs may be better equipped to address area broadband needs at the local level, offering more holistic solutions that can connect businesses, schools, hospitals, libraries, and other anchor institutions in a community to area residents. Community-driven development of broadband infrastructure in turn has the ability to deeply engage community members with the broadband deployment process, which is particularly important in communities that are presently unserved and that may need additional digital literacy training and ongoing technical support.
- An Interconnection Obligation on providers receiving fund support is necessary to ensure that communities have access to backhaul capacity, particularly if the Commission uses a portable consumer subsidy to disperse benefits to remote areas. It would provide critical capacity to providers seeking to offer service to remote communities. An interconnection obligation would maintain the potential for competition in areas presently served by only one provider and can provide high-cost area residents more choices in terms of services and plans. Such an obligation can also ensure that USF support can benefit a wide variety of providers.

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<sup>1</sup> In the Matter of Connect America Fund, WC Docket Nos. 10-90, 07-135, 05-337, 03-109, GN Docket No. 09-51; CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 96-45, *Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking*, (rel. Nov. 18, 2011) (“Order”).

Adopted: February 24, 2012

Abstaining: American Consumer Institute, Consumer Electronics Association, CTIA The Wireless Association, National Cable and Telecommunications Association, Time Warner Cable, T-mobile.

Respectfully submitted:

Debra R. Berlyn, Chairperson

FCC Consumer Advisory Committee