



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

July 31, 2015

The Honorable Ron Johnson
Chairman
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
United States Senate
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Johnson:

On June 2, 2015, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) publicly released a report entitled *Intended Outcomes and Effectiveness of Efforts to Address Adoption Barriers are Unclear* – GAO-15-473. The GAO Report examines: (1) what is known about the benefits of home broadband adoption, (2) barriers to broadband adoption and approaches used to address them, and (3) the extent to which FCC and NTIA have set goals for and assessed their effectiveness at addressing broadband adoption barriers. The Report recommends that, in order to more clearly establish the outcomes the FCC intends to achieve through its efforts to address broadband adoption barriers faced by demographics with low levels of adoption, the FCC revise its strategic plan to more clearly indicate whether addressing broadband adoption barriers is a major function, and if so, specify what outcomes the Commission intends to achieve.

In the Wireline Competition Bureau's response to the GAO draft report, the Bureau made clear that reducing barriers to broadband adoption has been, and continues to be, a significant priority for the Commission. This is evident in many different Commission efforts currently underway. For example, the Commission has recently released a Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (FNPRM) in connection with the Lifeline program that is a significant step towards modernizing the program to support broadband. The FNPRM proposes to adopt minimum service levels for all Lifeline offerings, including broadband offerings, while maintaining the current Lifeline subsidy. This approach should ensure that both low-income consumers and ratepayers get full value from the program. The FNPRM also takes steps to encourage more competition to improve price and service, to encourage more participation by the states, and proposes measures to further reduce waste and abuse in the program.

Of particular relevance, the FNPRM seeks comment on a program evaluation to determine the extent to which Lifeline has contributed towards fulfilling its program goals, such as narrowing the gap in voice and broadband penetration rates, and at what cost. In addition to increasing adoption of those services, the FNPRM also seeks comment on ways the program could improve the affordability of voice and broadband. And the FNPRM specifically seeks comment on what metrics and timeframe the Commission should use to determine whether Lifeline funds are being spent efficiently. We will carefully review the record on these issues to determine the appropriate outcomes for the program going forward.

We are also seeking to reduce potential obstacles to adoption in connection with our Broadband Progress Report. In the 2015 Broadband Progress Report, the Commission reported on its statutory obligation to evaluate whether advanced telecommunications capability is being deployed to all Americans in a reasonable and timely fashion, and considered the totality of the circumstances when determining broadband availability. The report evaluated factors such as broadband speeds, latency,

consistency and reliability of service, usage allowances, and price. In addition, the Report also considered the importance of broadband adoption as part of the required analysis, including a report on broadband adoption rates. The Commission is required to produce this Report annually and the next Broadband Progress Report is due for release early next year.

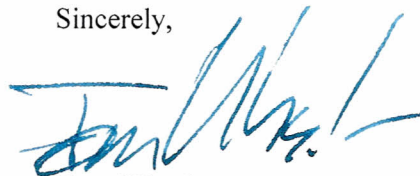
The Commission also has sought to reduce barriers to broadband adoption through its implementation of the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act (CVAA), a law designed to ensure access to broadband technologies for individuals with disabilities. For example, on July 1, 2015, the Commission extended the National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program, which provides \$10 million annually to support the distribution of accessible communications equipment to low-income individuals who are deaf-blind across the country, through June 2016. On May 21, 2015, the Commission also proposed rules to make this program permanent. In addition, the Commission is actively implementing various other requirements set forth in the CVAA that require access to content, services and equipment used with broadband technologies, including requirements for closed captioning on video clips delivered via Internet protocol when these clips were part of programs first shown on television with closed captioning; for televised emergency information to be provided in an audio format when shown on tablets, smartphones and other second screen devices; and to ensure that advanced communications services and equipment used for broadband technologies are accessible by people with disabilities. And earlier this year the Commission established the Disability Advisory Committee, so that stakeholders interested in disability matters can provide advice and recommendations to the Commission on ways to ensure disability access to broadband and other communication technologies.

We believe these measures will continue to contribute to the overall trend of increasing adoption, particularly among groups with relatively low rates of adoption.

Finally, consistent with GAO's recommendations, we are working on revisions to the Commission's Strategic Plan that will clarify and confirm the important role that removing barriers to broadband adoption plays in the Commission's fulfillment of its mission. Although broadband adoption is a complex issue with multiple determinants, we remain committed to removing or diminishing the key barriers that the Commission can influence.

We appreciate GAO's analysis and recommendations and share its concern for ensuring that barriers to broadband adoption are addressed. Should you have any questions or comments regarding this matter, I would be pleased to discuss them with you.

Sincerely,

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Tom Wheeler

cc: The Honorable Frank Pallone
The Honorable Anna Eshoo
The Honorable Edward Markey



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July 31, 2015

The Honorable Thomas R. Carper
Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
United States Senate
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Carper:

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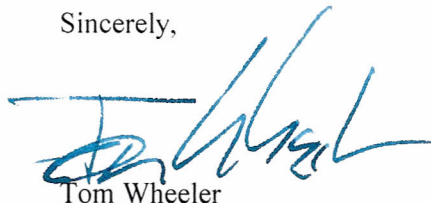
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July 31, 2015

The Honorable Jason Chaffetz
Chairman
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
U.S. House of Representatives
2157 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Chaffetz:

On June 2, 2015, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) publicly released a report entitled *Intended Outcomes and Effectiveness of Efforts to Address Adoption Barriers are Unclear* – GAO-15-473. The GAO Report examines: (1) what is known about the benefits of home broadband adoption, (2) barriers to broadband adoption and approaches used to address them, and (3) the extent to which FCC and NTIA have set goals for and assessed their effectiveness at addressing broadband adoption barriers. The Report recommends that, in order to more clearly establish the outcomes the FCC intends to achieve through its efforts to address broadband adoption barriers faced by demographics with low levels of adoption, the FCC revise its strategic plan to more clearly indicate whether addressing broadband adoption barriers is a major function, and if so, specify what outcomes the Commission intends to achieve.

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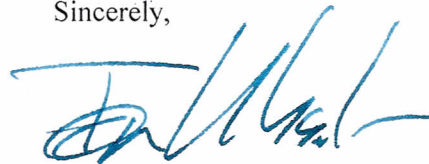
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July 31, 2015

The Honorable Elijah E. Cummings
Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
U.S. House of Representatives
2157 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

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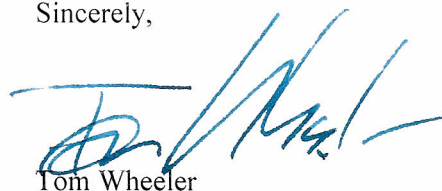
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