



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

March 1, 2016

The Honorable Steve Daines
United States Senate
320 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Daines:

Thank you for your letter encouraging the Commission to consider the possibility of providing support to wireless internal connections through the Commission's Rural Healthcare (RHC) Program. Your views are very important and will be included in the record of the proceeding.

I wholeheartedly agree with your view that access to high-speed broadband is a key component in the delivery of modern quality healthcare. Today's broadband networks – wired and wireless – have the potential to revolutionize healthcare like no technology before. Indeed, broadband technology access is critical to participate fully in today's economy. My trip last fall to Montana confirmed the persistent digital divide in this country, with rural communities disproportionately bypassed by the Internet revolution. That is why expanding high-speed broadband connections to all corners of the country is a top priority for the Commission.

The Commission's Rural Health Care (RHC) Program provides support for connections for eligible nonprofit and public health care providers. In December 2012, the Commission, under the leadership of my predecessor, Chairman Julius Genachowski, reformed the universal support programs for health care. This reform resulted in the creation of the Healthcare Connect Fund, which provides a 65 percent discount on high-capacity broadband connectivity to both individual rural health care providers (HCP) and to consortia of HCPs that have a majority of rural sites. However, as you note, the Commission did not at that time extend support for internal connections.

The Commission currently has pending before it a Petition for Rulemaking filed by the Schools, Health & Libraries Broadband Coalition and six consortia, who participated in the RHC Broadband Pilot Program, including the Health Information Exchange of Montana. The Petition contains a number of proposals for many aspects of the RHC Program. The Wireline Competition Bureau sought comment on the Petition and reply comments were due at the end of January. Staff are currently reviewing and analyzing the comments.

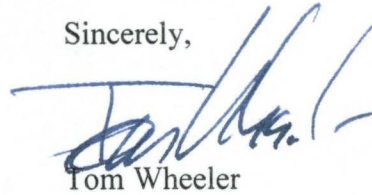
While that Petition did not specifically address the issue of internal connections, the record in this proceeding remains open and Commission staff continue to meet with interested stakeholders. It is possible that as the proceeding moves ahead, the issue of wireless internal connections will be raised and reviewed. In addition, Commission staff are available to meet

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with your staff, as well as your constituents, regarding their interest in this issue, including whether they wish to file anything in the record.

Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Tom Wheeler", with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Tom Wheeler