



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

March 15, 2016

The Honorable Pedro R. Pierluisi
U.S. House of Representatives
1213 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Pierluisi:

Thank you for your letter regarding applications for E-rate funds filed by private schools in Puerto Rico, and your concern that language barriers may have affected the schools' ability to effectively respond to inquiries from the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC), the administrator of the program, about the schools' compliance with E-rate rules.

I share your desire to ensure that all schools and libraries have an equal opportunity to participate in the E-rate program. After hearing from multiple schools in Puerto Rico last year about language challenges they experienced while attempting to participate in the E-rate program, Commission staff asked USAC to identify ways to more effectively reach out to schools where Spanish is the first language of administrators and staff. Since then, USAC has taken multiple steps to improve outreach to schools in Puerto Rico, and Spanish-speaking applicants generally. These steps track many of your recommendations to ensure that Puerto Rico applicants have an equal opportunity to participate in the E-rate program.

First, last month, USAC conducted its first-ever Spanish-language Puerto Rico training sessions in San Juan. Over 100 private schools and public libraries attended. The training was provided in both English and Spanish. Second, these events coincided with the unveiling of a new "USAC en Español" section of USAC's website, which can be found at usac.org/about/espanol/. USAC en Español provides Spanish-speaking applicants with Spanish-language outreach materials and contact information for Spanish-speaking USAC representatives. Third, while Spanish-language customer support has been available for several years, we are working with USAC to ensure that it continues to advance its dedicated Spanish-language outreach through additional Puerto Rico outreach events, further translation of program materials, translated news updates, and enhanced Spanish-language customer support. We welcome feedback from your office and from your constituents.

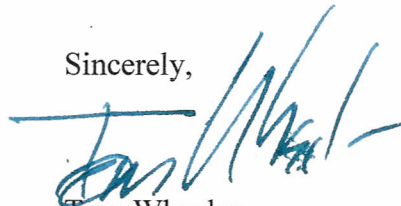
In your letter, you also express concerns regarding specific funding denial letters issued by USAC to several private schools in Puerto Rico. As you have explained, you believe that applicants did not understand USAC's requests for information or were unable to articulate an adequate response due to a language barrier.

Commission staff is working with USAC to identify denials where miscommunications due to language barriers may have caused USAC to conclude that there was a violation of the

rules. Where that appears to be the case, USAC will reach out with a translator to get additional information. Moreover, the Commission's rules provide that any person aggrieved by an action taken by USAC, after first seeking review at USAC, may seek review from the Commission. The Commission reviews all appeals of USAC actions, including any appeal of these funding denial letters, *de novo*, meaning that USAC's decisions do not have a direct bearing on the Commission's review. In all events, USAC will provide any applicant or service provider that asks for Spanish-English translation with such assistance and has committed to be more proactive in offering such services when there appears to be a language barrier.

I appreciate your concern for ensuring fair and equal opportunities for all E-rate applicants and am dedicated to advancing that interest. Please let me know if I can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,



Tom Wheeler