



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

September 27, 2018

The Honorable Tina Smith
United States Senate
309 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Smith:

Thank you for your letter expressing support for the Commission's inquiry into creating the Connected Care Pilot Program and for telemedicine generally. As the son of two doctors in rural Kansas, I understand the critical role that broadband plays in providing patients in rural areas with high-quality health care services. And as Chairman, I've seen the potential of telemedicine firsthand, from a Veterans Affairs facility in rural Lecanto, Florida to Hermiston, Oregon, where local health care providers are making a real impact on rural communities.

As you note, broadband-enabled telehealth can provide access to health care services that may not otherwise be available to those in rural America—including those in Minnesota, where health care provider shortages and other challenges otherwise prevent families from getting the care they need. That is why the Commission is taking steps to support broadband connectivity for those communities with the goal of maximizing the benefits of telehealth for all Americans through enhanced digital access. In June, the Commission adopted a Report and Order that takes immediate action to increase funding for rural hospitals and health clinics by 43%, or \$171 million per year. This increase—along with future inflation adjustments and a mechanism to carry forward unused funding from previous years—will help ensure that rural health care providers get the connectivity they need to better serve patients for years to come.

On August 2, 2018, the Commission unanimously adopted a Notice of Inquiry, led by Commissioner Carr, which seeks public input on how the Commission can help advance the movement in telehealth towards connected care—high-tech care that can be delivered directly to patients regardless of where they are physically. Specifically, the Notice seeks comment on creating an experimental Connected Care Pilot Program to support the delivery of connected care telehealth services to low-income Americans. Reply comments are due in the coming weeks, and we will be sure to include your comments in the record of the proceeding and take them into account as we move forward.

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I look forward to reviewing the record that develops in response to the Notice, and to working with you and my colleagues to bridge this critical gap in the digital divide. Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,


Ajit V. Pai

P.S. Senator, I really appreciate your inquiry and hope to collaborate with you. I've seen in so many rural communities and places like VA health facilities that telemedicine is a game-changer!