



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

January 3, 2019

The Honorable John Hoeven
United States Senate
338 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510


Dear Senator Hoeven:

Thank you for your letter regarding the Northland Healthcare Alliance's request for waiver of Commission rules related to the Rural Health Care program. Although I cannot comment on the merits of this issue, I can assure you that the Wireline Competition Bureau is making every effort to conclude its review as quickly and equitably as possible in accordance with the law and the facts. Our staff will take into consideration the issues and concerns presented by all stakeholders. As in all such cases, we will strive to achieve the Rural Health Care program's important mission to serve communities in need throughout the United States while protecting the program from potential waste, fraud, and abuse—an issue that has become all the more pressing and thus required more scrutiny of applications in the Rural Health Care program over the past few years.

In recent years, significant enforcement actions against two carriers increased awareness of potential problems in the Rural Health Care Program, which demonstrated the need for additional scrutiny of funding requests. Initially, this resulted in increased review times, as well as an influx of appeals and waiver requests. Commission staff have been working diligently to address these requests, and as USAC's review process has improved, any backlog has been alleviated, and staff should be able to act on Northland Healthcare Alliance's waiver request in the near future. Under section 1.3 of the Commission's rules, 47 CFR. § 1.3, the Commission may grant a waiver of its rules if (1) special circumstances warrant deviation from the general rule, and (2) the deviation would better serve the public interest than strict application of the general rule. In accordance with Commission practice, staff of the Wireline Competition Bureau review requests for waivers of the Rural Health Care Program's rules in the first instance, and the Bureau's decision can be appealed to the full Commission.

I appreciate your interest in this matter. Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,


Ajit V. Pai

Senator, look forward to working with you in the 116th Congress!