

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 1, 2019

Honorable Ajit Pai
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20554

Received & Inspected
MAY 7 - 2019
FCC 467 Room
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Dear Chairman Pai:

In North Dakota, we know how important a quality broadband connection is to urban and rural citizens alike. While many North Dakotans benefit from high-speed internet, some residents still lack a quality connection to this increasingly necessary tool. That is why we write to encourage the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to take steps to improve broadband maps.

As you know, broadband enables economic development, increases the ability to access health care services, and expands educational horizons to position our students to compete in a 21st Century economy. In fact, North Dakota has a project underway that will make it the first state in the nation to bring a gigabit internet connection to every school. Having access to quality broadband will play a critical role in allowing the United States to remain a global leader.

The importance of access to broadband is why we write to share our concerns with the current broadband maps. We request that the FCC more precisely identify where fixed and mobile broadband service is available or lacking in North Dakota and across the United States. Congress has made it a priority to invest in programs to expand quality broadband service to unserved and underserved areas of our nation. Accurate broadband maps are important to ensure federal funding is used efficiently and effectively, and targets areas that stand to benefit the most.

As you know, data for broadband maps is based upon information received from internet service providers. FCC Form 477 asks providers to report where internet service is advertised by census blocks. Our constituents have highlighted that there are several problems with the current maps. First, maps are not granular enough. More granular maps would more accurately identify where service exists and where it does not. Currently, in regards to the fixed broadband map, an entire census block will appear as served if just one location in that census block has service. This can result in denial of broadband funding in such areas, leaving many locations without essential broadband service simply because they share a census block with a served household. Another significant concern is that there is not a streamlined process to verify the accuracy of data reported. This means funding decisions flow directly from a map that has not been verified at the federal level. As the Mobility Fund experience indicated, reliance only upon self-reported data does not always yield helpful information or good results.

It is important for the FCC to develop more standardized, granular reporting of broadband availability – while also balancing the burdens of reporting especially for smaller operators. Additionally, it is important to ensure the accuracy of that more granular data. Therefore, we encourage the FCC to establish robust and meaningful challenge processes that will enable better validation of both fixed and mobile data prior to relying upon such data in making funding or financing decisions.

It is critical to ensure inaccurate information will not result in a denial of access to fixed or mobile broadband, or result in the overbuilding of an existing, quality network. A validated set of data based upon standardized methods of granular reporting is essential to ensuring that universal service is available throughout rural America. Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to continue working with you to ensure that Americans have access to robust and reliable broadband service.

Sincerely,



JOHN HOEVEN
U.S. Senator



KEVIN CRAMER
U.S. Senator



KELLY ARMSTRONG
U.S. Congressman