

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

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July 8, 2019

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

Dear Chairman Pai:

We are pleased that the Federal Communications Commission is continuing to work on the important issue of accurate broadband maps. It is vital that we are able to more precisely identify where fixed and mobile broadband service is available or lacking the United States.

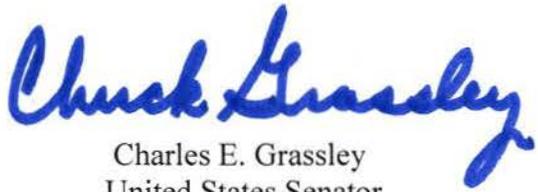
Current broadband availability maps are based largely upon whatever information may be received from providers. There are several problems with the current FCC maps. One example is that the maps are not granular enough. In the context of fixed broadband, an entire census block will appear as served even if service is offered to only one location within that census block. This can result in denial of broadband network funding or financing in such areas. Another concern is that the maps represent unvalidated reports from providers. While providers certify as to the accuracy of information presented, the process used to verify such information before funding or financing decisions are made can vary – or, in many cases, such processes do not exist at all.

According to your 2018 Broadband Deployment Report, more than three in four rural Iowans have access to broadband. More broadly, the report indicates that 90.5 percent of all Iowans have access to broadband. As much as we wish that were the case, we can tell you that the FCC data drastically overstates broadband access throughout our state. For example, in Chickasaw County, a rural area in the northeastern part of Iowa, the FCC reports universal broadband access. However, usage data available from technology companies suggests that only 5.9 percent of Chickasaw's residents access the internet at broadband speeds. That discrepancy is too large.

While we appreciate everything that the Commission has done to expand rural broadband connectivity, it is critical for these maps to be improved so public and private partners alike have access to the accurate data needed to bridge the digital divide. Broadband access is a vital link to a range of necessary services and resources for rural America, including business and economic activity, education access, and providing healthcare in a flexible, efficient, and cost-effective way. Therefore, it is critical to ensure inaccurate information will not result in a denial of access to fixed or mobile broadband. A validated set of data based upon standardized methods of granular reporting will be essential to ensure that funding is available throughout rural America.

Thank you for your time and continued attention to this important matter for rural America. We look forward to working with you as the FCC continues to work to ensure all Americans have access to robust and reliable broadband.

Sincerely,


Charles E. Grassley
United States Senator


Joni K. Ernst
United States Senator