

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 29, 2019

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

Dear Chairman Pai:

We write to express our strong disapproval of the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) elimination of the educational requirements for the Educational Broadband Service (EBS) in the Report and Order entitled "Transforming the 2.5 GHz Band," which will result in the auctioning of unassigned licenses from EBS to commercial carriers. While there are elements of the FCC's action that benefit Tribal Nations—which we support—the disregard for the longstanding educational purposes of the 2.5 GHz spectrum is troubling and ill-advised. As Members of the House Majority Whip's Task Force on Rural Broadband, we urge you to reverse this decision.

EBS originated with President John F. Kennedy's vision that television could be a transformational medium to educate Americans. From that vision, the Instructional Fixed Television Service (ITFS) was created and allowed the distribution of licenses to educational institutions that delivered instructional services to schools. In 2004, ITFS was rebranded to EBS and expanded the potential of this spectrum to encourage deployment of educational broadband. Today, millions of Americans—particularly those who reside in rural areas—have access to the internet because of this creative vision.

However, the rural-urban digital divide remains and has enormous consequences for our children and future generations. A recent Pew Research Report found 35 percent of lower-income households with school-age children did not have a broadband internet connection at home. This gap has consequences for rural America and will exacerbate the homework gap, high school dropout rates, and the health of rural economies.

The Schools, Health & Libraries Broadband Coalition recently published a report that found licensing unassigned space to commercial entities over educators and nonprofits will have meager economic and social benefits.¹ Specifically, the study found "...compelling evidence in support of a policy that extends and modernizes the current licensing regime, which recognizes a preference

¹ Raul Katz and Fernando Callorda, "The Economic Benefit of Keeping the "E" in EBS: A Comparison of Licensing Unassigned EBS to Educators and Nonprofits vs. Commercial Auctions," Telecom Advisory Services, June 2019, <http://www.shlb.org/uploads/Policy/Policy%20Research/SHLB%20Research/SHLB%20EBS%20Economic%20Study.pdf>

for tribes and educational institutions.”² Such modernization of the EBS system would have increased LTE penetration, created jobs, and reduced the homework gap across rural America.

It is imperative that we rigorously pursue all options that reduce the rural-urban digital divide. The FCC’s decision to gut EBS’ education requirements is a step in the wrong direction; we implore you to reverse this decision.

Let’s work together to close the digital divide in this great nation.

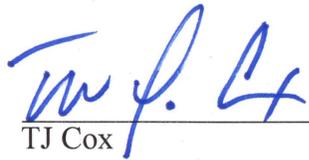
Sincerely,



Grace Meng
Member of Congress



James E. Clyburn
House Majority Whip



TJ Cox
Member of Congress



Ro Khanna
Member of Congress



Cindy Axne
Member of Congress

² Ibid., 5.