WASHINGTON, January 14, 2020—Federal Communications Commission Chairman Ajit Pai announced initial estimates of how many homes and businesses in each state could benefit from Phase I of the $20.4 billion Rural Digital Opportunity Fund. In total, about 6 million rural homes and businesses could be eligible for bidding in an auction slated for later this year to receive funding for high-speed broadband. This state-by-state list is for Phase I funding, which would target a total of $16 billion to census blocks with no broadband service at all meeting the Commission’s minimum speed standards. The remainder of the funding would be disbursed during Phase II. As recently announced, the FCC will vote January 30 on launching the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund.

“The digital divide affects many people in many rural communities. I’ve said that the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund would be our boldest step yet to bridge this divide, and today we get a glimpse of the broad impact this investment in rural America would have across the country,” said Chairman Pai. “Our staff’s initial estimate shows that in 25 states there would be more than 100,000 locations that would be eligible for Phase I of the Fund, and the benefits would be felt from the Pacific Coast to the Great Plains, and from Appalachia to the Gulf Coast. The Rural Digital Opportunity Fund is critical to bridging the digital divide. I hope that my colleagues will join me in voting for it on January 30.”

The preliminary state-by-state list is below.*
The Rural Digital Opportunity Fund would allocate $20.4 billion through a reverse-auction format to connect millions of rural homes and small businesses to high-speed broadband networks. The Fund would target areas that lack access to 25/3 Mbps broadband services in two stages. During Phase I, the FCC would target $16 billion to areas that are wholly unserved by such broadband (where there is no 25/3 Mbps service at all). For Phase II, the FCC would use its new granular broadband mapping approach, called the Digital Opportunity Data Collection, to target unserved households in areas that are partially served by such broadband (areas where some households have access to 25/3 Mbps service but others do not). Phase II would also include areas that do not receive winning bids in Phase I.

* Commission staff’s initial estimate is that approximately six million model-determined locations would be eligible for bidding in Phase I of the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund. This figure is subject to change for a variety of reasons, including updated data regarding broadband deployment and construction as well as any modifications made to Chairman Pai’s draft rules. Locations in Alaska and New York are not eligible for RDOF because of previously established programs to fund rural broadband in these states.