



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF  
THE CHAIRMAN

March 20, 2020

The Honorable Maria Cantwell  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation  
United States Senate  
425 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Cantwell:

Thank you for your letter regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. During this crisis, it is critical that Americans maintain connectivity so that they can stay in touch with loved ones, telework, participate in telehealth and remote learning, and maintain the social distancing necessary to slow the spread of the coronavirus. As a result, the Commission has been hard at work on a variety of fronts to keep Americans connected during the coronavirus outbreak, and I am pleased to update you on our efforts to date.

First, in order to ensure that Americans do not lose their broadband or telephone connectivity as a result of these exceptional circumstances, I have asked broadband and telephone service providers to take the "Keep Americans Connected Pledge." The Keep Americans Connected Pledge includes a 60-day commitment: (1) not to terminate service to any residential or small business customers because of their inability to pay their bills due to the disruptions caused by the coronavirus pandemic; (2) to waive any late fees that any residential or small business customers may incur because of their economic circumstances related to the coronavirus pandemic; and (3) to open a company's Wi-Fi hotspots to any American who needs them. To date, 390 broadband and telephone service providers across the country, including all of our nation's largest providers, taken the Pledge and thus agreed to take these concrete steps to help Americans stay connected for the next 60 days.

I have also asked companies to go above and beyond the Pledge and take additional steps to maintain connectivity during the pandemic. For example, I have asked broadband providers to improve their low-income broadband programs, relax data caps where appropriate, and enhance remote learning and telehealth opportunities. I am pleased with the response that I have received. For example, Comcast is increasing broadband speeds for Internet Essentials (low-income) customers from 15 Mbps to 25 Mbps, offering broadband service for free for 60 days to new Internet Essentials customers, and offering all customers unlimited data for 60 days. AT&T is providing all consumer home Internet wireline customers, as well as Fixed Wireless Internet customers, with unlimited Internet data. It is also expanding eligibility to its Access from AT&T (low-income) program to households participating in the National School Lunch Program and Head Start and offering new Access from AT&T customers two months of free service. Charter is offering up to 100 Mbps broadband service for free for 60 days to new households with K-12 and/or college students and waiving installation fees for such households. And Verizon is tripling the data usage limit for students in Title I schools that are part of the Verizon Innovative

Learning Program and committing an additional \$10 million to nonprofits supporting students and first responders.

The Commission has also taken a number of steps to help meet connectivity needs through the Universal Service Fund. Last Friday, for example, the Commission unanimously adopted my February proposal to fully fund all eligible Rural Health Care Program services for the current funding year with an additional \$42.19 million in funding. The Commission's action will help ensure that rural healthcare providers have the resources they need to promote telehealth solutions for their patients.

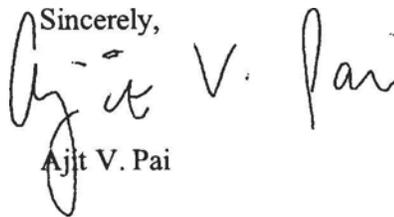
We have also waived gift rules governing the Rural Health Care and E-Rate programs until September 30, 2020 to enable service providers to offer, and hospitals, schools, and libraries to solicit and accept, improved connections or additional equipment for telemedicine or remote learning during the coronavirus outbreak. These critical changes will make it easier for broadband providers to support telehealth and remote learning efforts during the pandemic. To assist E-Rate participants, we also extended the E-Rate application filing window for Fiscal Year 2020 by 35 days to April 29, 2020 to address potential delays caused by COVID-19.

This week, we also waived the Lifeline program's recertification and reverification requirements for participating low-income consumers for 60 days and waived for 60 days the requirement that participating carriers' enrollment representatives register with the Lifeline program administrator, the Universal Service Administrative Company. These changes will ease burdens on Lifeline subscribers during the coronavirus pandemic and allow Lifeline carriers to focus their efforts on assisting customers.

Moreover, we have quickly granted Special Temporary Authority to T-Mobile, U.S. Cellular, and Verizon to use additional spectrum over the next 60 days to meet customer demand for mobile broadband. With respect to U.S. Cellular, its STA will allow the company to operate for 60 days in spectrum licensed to Advantage Spectrum in the AWS-3 Band in order to provide additional capacity to U.S. Cellular customers in parts of California, Oregon, Wisconsin, and your home state of Washington.

Finally, with respect to your suggestions for additional measures that the FCC could take to promote telehealth and remote learning during the coronavirus pandemic, the Commission has been working with Congress to secure the necessary authority and funding, and I am hopeful that this collaboration will produce results in the days to come.

I appreciate your interest in this matter.

Sincerely,  
  
Ajit V. Pai