



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 actions the Federal Communications Commission is taking to address the spread of the Coronavirus/COVID-19 pandemic. The Commission's top priority is to maintain the safety of its employees while fulfilling its mission of ensuring that the public continues to have access to reliable communications networks. To that end, the FCC has taken several steps to protect its employees, monitor communications networks, and provide support to keep Americans connected.

The Commission has updated and issued its FCC Pandemic Plan and continues to monitor information and guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Department of Homeland Security, and other agencies. To protect the health of our employees, we have prohibited visitors from entering FCC facilities without the permission of the Office of Managing Director and instructed that such permission will only be given for reasons of operational necessity. The FCC has also implemented maximum telework flexibility for its employees, with a very small number of employees performing work at FCC facilities due to specific mission requirements. Moreover, beginning Monday, March 23, 2020, the FCC will implement mandatory telework for all FCC employees, unless they are authorized to access an FCC facility to perform critical, mission essential functions that cannot be performed remotely. Additionally, the FCC is authorizing full-time employees to be granted up to 10 hours of administrative leave per week for the weeks of March 22 and March 29 if they are prevented from (tele)working due to (1) school or daycare closures resulting in a lapse in childcare, which requires them to provide care; or (2) other reasons they identify related to COVID-19 such as assisting another family member in order to help prevent exposure/spread of COVID-19. Part-time employees may be granted administrative leave each week in an amount not to exceed a quarter of their total number of hours they are scheduled to work.

FCC IT systems had already been optimized to enable performance of work from remote locations. This enabled most of our staff to smoothly transition to telework beginning on Friday, March 13. By significantly depopulating our facilities, risk to remaining employees is lowered, and those few employees who are working in the building are better able to exercise social distancing. We have also been reviewing our Continuity of Operations (COOP) Plan and are prepared to take further measures should our headquarters building, or other FCC facilities

require closure. We have cancelled or suspended all non-critical domestic and international travel, as well as all in-person participation in events. I have communicated with the entire FCC workforce about the need to stay safe and have conveyed information such as the Federal Occupational Health guidance on coronavirus-related anxiety and stress. And our Chief of Staff has had numerous direct email communications with the agency staff to share his concerns, encourage teleworking, and encourage staff to follow CDC safety measures.

Additionally, the Commission is working to ensure Americans stay connected with broadband or telephone connectivity during the COVID-19 outbreak. Specifically, 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.

The FCC has 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, AT&T, 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.

In addition, the Commission has taken regulatory action to grant Telecommunications Relay Service providers temporary waivers to better enable American Sign Language interpreters to work from home in order to maintain relay services during the pandemic for individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf-blind, or have a speech disability.

Since the agency's workforce moved to near-total telework, FCC leadership has provided additional information to ensure that our work continues unabated. The FCC's Chief Information Officer has provided information to improve efficient use of network services, additional conference bridges have been issued to permit seamless transition to virtual meetings, and guidance has been issued on effectively conducting remote meetings. Further guidance to our dedicated workforce will be issued as appropriate.

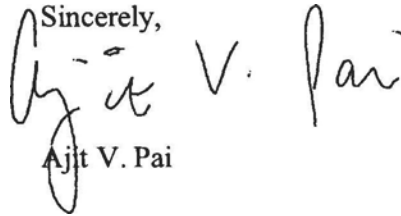
We have advised our staff to conduct meetings using electronic methods such as WebEx, teleconference bridges, and other means. For example, the meeting of the Communications Security, Reliability, and Interoperability Council was held and the Precision Agriculture Task Force this month will be held using WebEx and a teleconference bridge. I personally have done several virtual "meetings" using such bridges.

The Commission continues to engage with our Federal partners in the whole-of-government response. For example, we are working closely with the Department of Homeland Security, which is the sector-specific agency for telecommunications. And we have collaborated well with the Department of Defense and the Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration in issuing certain STAs, as described above.

We continue to monitor developments with an eye to any additional regulatory measures and further industry coordination needed to sustain the ability of the public to maintain

communications services during the coronavirus pandemic. The FCC's overall efforts related to the COVID-19 pandemic can be viewed at www.fcc.gov/keepamericansconnected and www.fcc.gov/coronavirus.

I appreciate your interest in this matter. Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,

Ajit V. Pai