



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

March 27, 2020

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Schumer:

Thank you for your letter regarding the Commission's Rural Digital Opportunity Fund. Closing the digital divide is my top priority. I have seen for myself what affordable high-speed Internet access can do for a community—for its families, its schools, its hospitals, its farms, its businesses—as well as the impact of its absence.

At the FCC's January meeting, we established final rules for the \$20.4 billion Rural Digital Opportunity Fund. This represents the Commission's biggest step yet to close the digital divide and will connect some of the hardest-to-serve areas of our country by providing support through a two-phase competitive auction for up to gigabit service to millions of unserved Americans who currently lack access to fixed 25/3 Mbps broadband. Phase I would target support to wholly unserved census blocks—those areas where our existing data tell us there is no 25/3 Mbps service at all—in order to make sure that the areas most in need will get broadband service quickly. Then, Phase II will fill in the remaining coverage gaps by supporting networks that will serve partially unserved census blocks, along with areas not won in Phase I. Phase II would leverage the Commission's Digital Opportunity Data Collection, the new granular, precise broadband mapping initiative the agency adopted this past August. In short, we're proposing to connect more Americans to faster broadband networks than any other universal service program has done.

Earlier this month, the Commission's Wireline Competition Bureau released the preliminary list of census blocks and a map of areas that have been deemed initially eligible for the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund Phase I auction (<https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DA-20-275A1.pdf>). Preliminary eligibility depends mainly on the most recent (June 2019) FCC data to identify those areas where no one disputes that service is lacking. Consistent with the Commission's longstanding policy of ensuring that finite universal service support is awarded in an efficient and cost-effective manner and does not go toward overbuilding areas where broadband providers already are receiving support to deploy 25/3 Mbps broadband service, the Bureau has commenced a limited challenge process. This process gives parties the opportunity to identify census blocks that have subsequently become served with voice and broadband services at speeds of 25/3 Mbps or better since June 2019 and areas where there is already an enforceable commitment for a service provider to deploy 25/3 Mbps broadband in connection with a state or federal broadband subsidy program. Commission staff will review comments

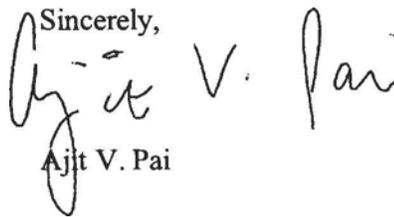
received identifying areas for exclusion or inclusion, and will release a final list of eligible blocks prior to the short-form application deadline.

With regard to how the FCC's Rural Digital Opportunity Fund program affects pre-existing broadband subsidy programs, the basic principle is simple: if a service provider already has been given funding (federal and/or state) to serve a particular area with 25/3 Mbps broadband, the FCC is not going to give them yet more taxpayer funding to do something they're already obligated (by federal and/or state law) to do. That would be an irresponsible use of limited taxpayer dollars and would bestow a windfall on corporations that should not be paid a second time to do what they should have done, or should be doing, after the first. In the next two paragraphs, I describe how this principle applies to federal and state programs, respectively.

With regard to the federal ReConnect Program, the Bureau will consult with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Utilities Service before publication of the final eligible areas and exclude the portions of any census blocks from eligibility for the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund Phase I that are substantially overlapped by a ReConnect awardee.

With regard to state programs, the Commission continues to support state efforts to connect more Americans to broadband and welcomes the opportunity to partner with states (as it has with states like New York) to align their funding streams with ours so as to stretch our funding as far as possible. In response to your questions, if a state hasn't already issued a formal funding commitment, that area will not be excluded from the Rural Digital Opportunities Fund Phase I Auction. In a similar vein, a "broadband subsidy program[] from 12 years ago" would have no bearing on our inquiry, nor would a future program that "ha[s] not yet awarded funding." I should also note that our goal is to not duplicate funding targeted to a particular area. This means—consistent with the principle I outlined above—if a service provider has state-based funding and a commitment to deploy 25/3 Mbps or better service in one area, it cannot receive FCC funding to deliver similar service to that same area. But it would still be eligible to participate in the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund in *other* areas in the state that are unserved and not covered by a funding commitment. Indeed, our dedicated staff stands ready to respond to any questions these state entities may have.

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

Sincerely,

Ajit V. Pai



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

March 27, 2020

The Honorable Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senate
478 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Gillibrand:

Thank you for your letter regarding the Commission's Rural Digital Opportunity Fund. Closing the digital divide is my top priority. I have seen for myself what affordable high-speed Internet access can do for a community—for its families, its schools, its hospitals, its farms, its businesses—as well as the impact of its absence.

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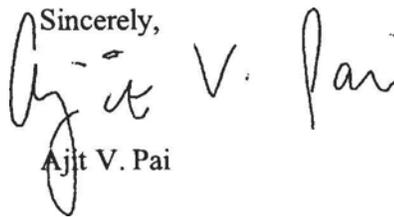
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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
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OFFICE OF
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March 27, 2020

The Honorable Tammy Duckworth
United States Senate
524 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Duckworth:

Thank you for your letter regarding the Commission's Rural Digital Opportunity Fund. Closing the digital divide is my top priority. I have seen for myself what affordable high-speed Internet access can do for a community—for its families, its schools, its hospitals, its farms, its businesses—as well as the impact of its absence.

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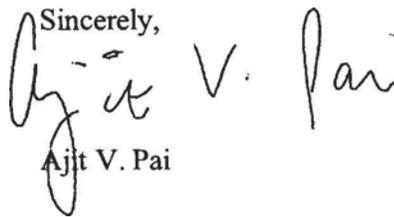
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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
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OFFICE OF
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March 27, 2020

The Honorable Cory Gardner
United States Senate
354 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Gardner:

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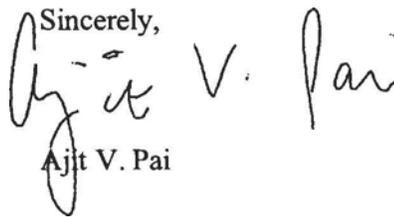
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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
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OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

March 27, 2020

The Honorable Tom Udall
United States Senate
531 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Udall:

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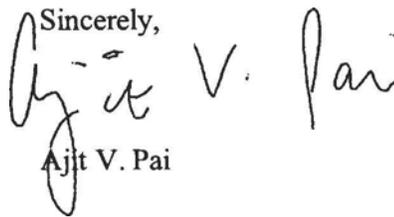
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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

March 27, 2020

The Honorable Ron Wyden
United States Senate
221 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Wyden:

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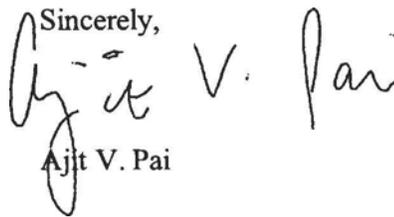
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OFFICE OF
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March 27, 2020

The Honorable Richard J. Durbin
United States Senate
711 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Durbin:

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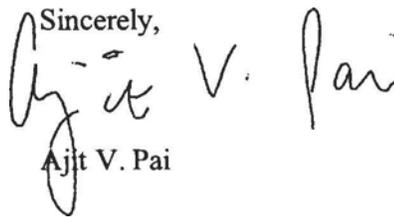
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With regard to state programs, the Commission continues to support state efforts to connect more Americans to broadband and welcomes the opportunity to partner with states (as it has with states like New York) to align their funding streams with ours so as to stretch our funding as far as possible. In response to your questions, if a state hasn't already issued a formal funding commitment, that area will not be excluded from the Rural Digital Opportunities Fund Phase I Auction. In a similar vein, a "broadband subsidy program[] from 12 years ago" would have no bearing on our inquiry, nor would a future program that "ha[s] not yet awarded funding." I should also note that our goal is to not duplicate funding targeted to a particular area. This means—consistent with the principle I outlined above—if a service provider has state-based funding and a commitment to deploy 25/3 Mbps or better service in one area, it cannot receive FCC funding to deliver similar service to that same area. But it would still be eligible to participate in the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund in *other* areas in the state that are unserved and not covered by a funding commitment. Indeed, our dedicated staff stands ready to respond to any questions these state entities may have.

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

Sincerely,

Ajit V. Pai



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

March 27, 2020

The Honorable Edward J. Markey
United States Senate
255 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Markey:

Thank you for your letter regarding the Commission's Rural Digital Opportunity Fund. Closing the digital divide is my top priority. I have seen for myself what affordable high-speed Internet access can do for a community—for its families, its schools, its hospitals, its farms, its businesses—as well as the impact of its absence.

At the FCC's January meeting, we established final rules for the \$20.4 billion Rural Digital Opportunity Fund. This represents the Commission's biggest step yet to close the digital divide and will connect some of the hardest-to-serve areas of our country by providing support through a two-phase competitive auction for up to gigabit service to millions of unserved Americans who currently lack access to fixed 25/3 Mbps broadband. Phase I would target support to wholly unserved census blocks—those areas where our existing data tell us there is no 25/3 Mbps service at all—in order to make sure that the areas most in need will get broadband service quickly. Then, Phase II will fill in the remaining coverage gaps by supporting networks that will serve partially unserved census blocks, along with areas not won in Phase I. Phase II would leverage the Commission's Digital Opportunity Data Collection, the new granular, precise broadband mapping initiative the agency adopted this past August. In short, we're proposing to connect more Americans to faster broadband networks than any other universal service program has done.

Earlier this month, the Commission's Wireline Competition Bureau released the preliminary list of census blocks and a map of areas that have been deemed initially eligible for the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund Phase I auction (<https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DA-20-275A1.pdf>). Preliminary eligibility depends mainly on the most recent (June 2019) FCC data to identify those areas where no one disputes that service is lacking. Consistent with the Commission's longstanding policy of ensuring that finite universal service support is awarded in an efficient and cost-effective manner and does not go toward overbuilding areas where broadband providers already are receiving support to deploy 25/3 Mbps broadband service, the Bureau has commenced a limited challenge process. This process gives parties the opportunity to identify census blocks that have subsequently become served with voice and broadband services at speeds of 25/3 Mbps or better since June 2019 and areas where there is already an enforceable commitment for a service provider to deploy 25/3 Mbps broadband in connection with a state or federal broadband subsidy program. Commission staff will review comments

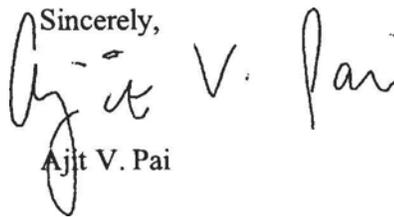
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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

March 27, 2020

The Honorable Angus King
United States Senate
133 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator King:

Thank you for your letter regarding the Commission's Rural Digital Opportunity Fund. Closing the digital divide is my top priority. I have seen for myself what affordable high-speed Internet access can do for a community—for its families, its schools, its hospitals, its farms, its businesses—as well as the impact of its absence.

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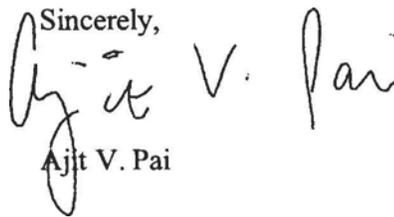
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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

March 27, 2020

The Honorable Amy Klobuchar
United States Senate
425 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Klobuchar:

Thank you for your letter regarding the Commission's Rural Digital Opportunity Fund. Closing the digital divide is my top priority. I have seen for myself what affordable high-speed Internet access can do for a community—for its families, its schools, its hospitals, its farms, its businesses—as well as the impact of its absence.

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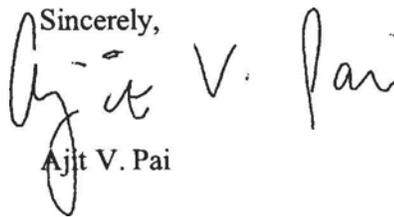
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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

March 27, 2020

The Honorable Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senate
730 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Hirono:

Thank you for your letter regarding the Commission's Rural Digital Opportunity Fund. Closing the digital divide is my top priority. I have seen for myself what affordable high-speed Internet access can do for a community—for its families, its schools, its hospitals, its farms, its businesses—as well as the impact of its absence.

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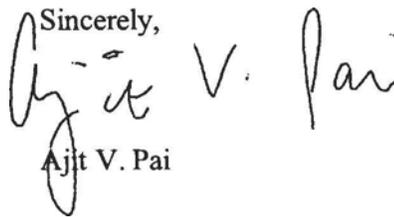
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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

March 27, 2020

The Honorable Chris Van Hollen
United States Senate
110 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Van Hollen:

Thank you for your letter regarding the Commission's Rural Digital Opportunity Fund. Closing the digital divide is my top priority. I have seen for myself what affordable high-speed Internet access can do for a community—for its families, its schools, its hospitals, its farms, its businesses—as well as the impact of its absence.

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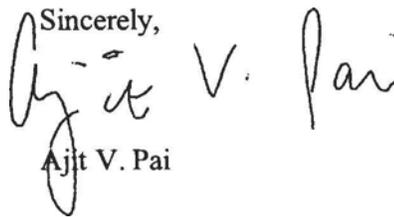
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Ajit V. Pai



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

March 27, 2020

The Honorable Michael Bennet
United States Senate
261 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Bennet:

Thank you for your letter regarding the Commission's Rural Digital Opportunity Fund. Closing the digital divide is my top priority. I have seen for myself what affordable high-speed Internet access can do for a community—for its families, its schools, its hospitals, its farms, its businesses—as well as the impact of its absence.

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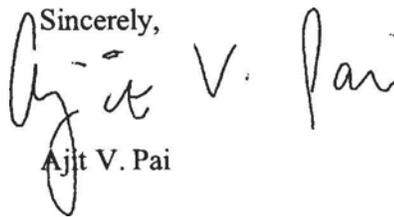
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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

March 27, 2020

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
United States Senate
313 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Merkley:

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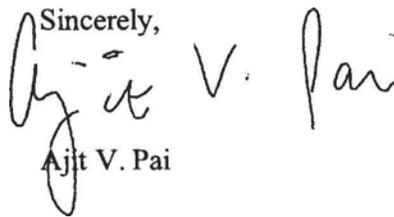
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Sincerely,

Ajit V. Pai



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

March 27, 2020

The Honorable Bernard Sanders
United States Senate
332 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Sanders:

Thank you for your letter regarding the Commission's Rural Digital Opportunity Fund. Closing the digital divide is my top priority. I have seen for myself what affordable high-speed Internet access can do for a community—for its families, its schools, its hospitals, its farms, its businesses—as well as the impact of its absence.

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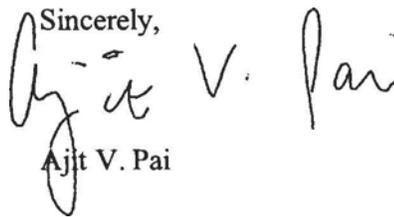
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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

March 27, 2020

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin
United States Senate
709 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Baldwin:

Thank you for your letter regarding the Commission's Rural Digital Opportunity Fund. Closing the digital divide is my top priority. I have seen for myself what affordable high-speed Internet access can do for a community—for its families, its schools, its hospitals, its farms, its businesses—as well as the impact of its absence.

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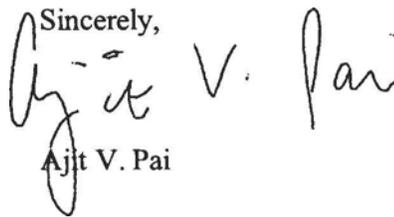
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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

March 27, 2020

The Honorable Brian Schatz
United States Senate
722 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Schatz:

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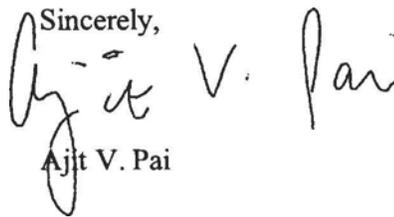
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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

March 27, 2020

The Honorable Patty Murray
United States Senate
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Murray:

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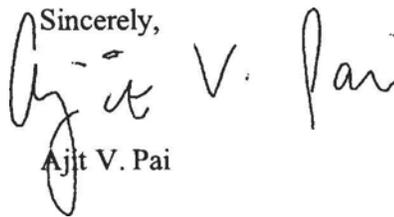
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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

March 27, 2020

The Honorable Bob Casey
United States Senate
393 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Casey:

Thank you for your letter regarding the Commission's Rural Digital Opportunity Fund. Closing the digital divide is my top priority. I have seen for myself what affordable high-speed Internet access can do for a community—for its families, its schools, its hospitals, its farms, its businesses—as well as the impact of its absence.

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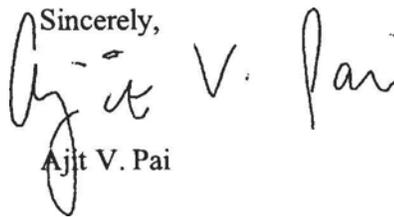
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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

March 27, 2020

The Honorable Mark Warner
United States Senate
703 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Warner:

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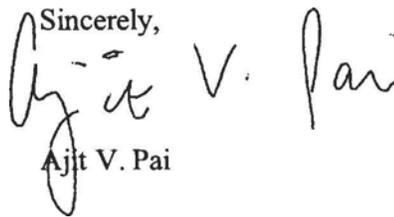
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With regard to state programs, the Commission continues to support state efforts to connect more Americans to broadband and welcomes the opportunity to partner with states (as it has with states like New York) to align their funding streams with ours so as to stretch our funding as far as possible. In response to your questions, if a state hasn't already issued a formal funding commitment, that area will not be excluded from the Rural Digital Opportunities Fund Phase I Auction. In a similar vein, a "broadband subsidy program[] from 12 years ago" would have no bearing on our inquiry, nor would a future program that "ha[s] not yet awarded funding." I should also note that our goal is to not duplicate funding targeted to a particular area. This means—consistent with the principle I outlined above—if a service provider has state-based funding and a commitment to deploy 25/3 Mbps or better service in one area, it cannot receive FCC funding to deliver similar service to that same area. But it would still be eligible to participate in the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund in *other* areas in the state that are unserved and not covered by a funding commitment. Indeed, our dedicated staff stands ready to respond to any questions these state entities may have.

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

Sincerely,

Ajit V. Pai



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

March 27, 2020

The Honorable Patrick J. Leahy
United States Senate
437 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Leahy:

Thank you for your letter regarding the Commission's Rural Digital Opportunity Fund. Closing the digital divide is my top priority. I have seen for myself what affordable high-speed Internet access can do for a community—for its families, its schools, its hospitals, its farms, its businesses—as well as the impact of its absence.

At the FCC's January meeting, we established final rules for the \$20.4 billion Rural Digital Opportunity Fund. This represents the Commission's biggest step yet to close the digital divide and will connect some of the hardest-to-serve areas of our country by providing support through a two-phase competitive auction for up to gigabit service to millions of unserved Americans who currently lack access to fixed 25/3 Mbps broadband. Phase I would target support to wholly unserved census blocks—those areas where our existing data tell us there is no 25/3 Mbps service at all—in order to make sure that the areas most in need will get broadband service quickly. Then, Phase II will fill in the remaining coverage gaps by supporting networks that will serve partially unserved census blocks, along with areas not won in Phase I. Phase II would leverage the Commission's Digital Opportunity Data Collection, the new granular, precise broadband mapping initiative the agency adopted this past August. In short, we're proposing to connect more Americans to faster broadband networks than any other universal service program has done.

Earlier this month, the Commission's Wireline Competition Bureau released the preliminary list of census blocks and a map of areas that have been deemed initially eligible for the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund Phase I auction (<https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DA-20-275A1.pdf>). Preliminary eligibility depends mainly on the most recent (June 2019) FCC data to identify those areas where no one disputes that service is lacking. Consistent with the Commission's longstanding policy of ensuring that finite universal service support is awarded in an efficient and cost-effective manner and does not go toward overbuilding areas where broadband providers already are receiving support to deploy 25/3 Mbps broadband service, the Bureau has commenced a limited challenge process. This process gives parties the opportunity to identify census blocks that have subsequently become served with voice and broadband services at speeds of 25/3 Mbps or better since June 2019 and areas where there is already an enforceable commitment for a service provider to deploy 25/3 Mbps broadband in connection with a state or federal broadband subsidy program. Commission staff will review comments

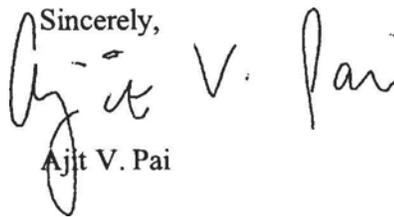
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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

March 27, 2020

The Honorable Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senate
509 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Cardin:

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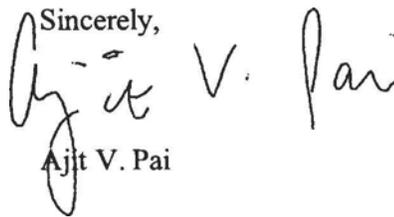
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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

March 27, 2020

The Honorable Cory Booker
United States Senate
717 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Booker:

Thank you for your letter regarding the Commission's Rural Digital Opportunity Fund. Closing the digital divide is my top priority. I have seen for myself what affordable high-speed Internet access can do for a community—for its families, its schools, its hospitals, its farms, its businesses—as well as the impact of its absence.

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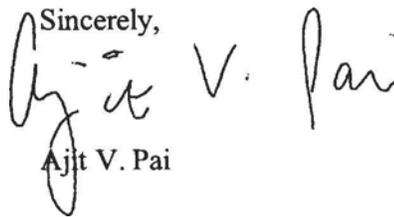
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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

March 27, 2020

The Honorable Elizabeth Warren
United States Senate
317 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

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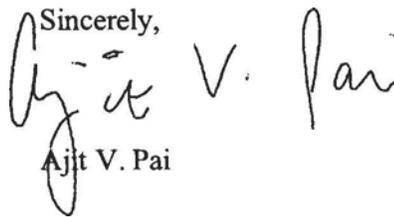
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