



OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

April 8, 2020

The Honorable Lisa Blunt Rochester
U.S. House of Representatives
1519 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congresswoman Rochester:

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. I'm committed to using every resource at the FCC's disposal to deal with this unprecedented national emergency.

As you may know, last month, the Commission asked Congress to provide us with emergency telehealth funding. At a time when our country is facing unprecedented challenges, telemedicine services have never been more important, and I'm thankful Congress included \$200 million in the CARES Act for the FCC to establish a COVID-19 telehealth program. Last Monday, I immediately presented a COVID-19 telehealth plan to my fellow commissioners, and they voted the next day to approve the item. It's now my intention to roll out the \$200 million on an expedited basis in order to help healthcare providers and patients alike. Using a streamlined application process, the Commission will make decisions on applications as rapidly as possible on a rolling basis in order to support eligible health care providers by allowing for the purchase of telecommunications services, information services, and devices necessary to enable the provision of telehealth services during this emergency period. In making funding decisions, we will have a preference of awarding funding to areas hardest hit by COVID-19 as well as to projects geared toward high-risk and vulnerable patients, including those most in need of engaging in social distancing.

The Commission is also 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 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, over 600 broadband and telephone service providers across the country, including all of our nation's largest providers, have 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 offering low-cost 200 Mbps broadband to low-income households, waiving voice and Internet charges for Lifeline customers for two billing cycles, and tripling the data usage limit for students in Title I schools that are part of the Verizon Innovative Learning Program.

The Commission has also taken a number of steps to help meet connectivity needs through the Universal Service Fund (USF). For example, the Commission unanimously adopted my February proposal to fully fund all eligible Rural Health Care (RHC) Program services for the current funding year with an additional \$42.19 million in funding. On March 26, we took additional action to assist RHC Program participants, including extending the RHC Program application window until June 30, 2020, easing competitive bidding requirements for health care providers with expiring evergreen contracts and extending deadlines for responses to inquiries from the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC). The Commission's action will help ensure that rural healthcare providers have the resources, as well as the flexibility, they need to promote telehealth solutions for their patients.

The Commission provided relief and flexibility to hundreds of rural broadband and telephone providers to immediately waive consumer fees. This includes late payment fees as well as installation and cancellation fees for consumers signing up for or switching Digital Subscriber Line (DSL) broadband providers in order to work from home or access remote learning.

We've also announced extensions of key E-Rate service implementation and filing deadlines to provide relief to program participants affected by the COVID-19 outbreak. Specifically, we waived the service implementation deadline for special construction for all funding year 2019 applicants and extended this deadline by one year to June 30, 2021. To further assist E-Rate participants, we previously extended the E-Rate application filing window for Fiscal Year 2020 to April 29, 2020 to address potential delays caused by COVID-19. These extensions will alleviate administrative and compliance burdens on schools and libraries and enable them to focus on transitioning to remote learning during the pandemic.

The Commission also took action to give certain carriers flexibility to focus USF money on hard-hit areas, allowing competitive eligible telecommunications carriers to use their high-cost legacy support in the service areas of any affiliated eligible telecommunications carrier in order to respond to the unprecedented challenges posed by COVID-19. The order waived the requirement that all legacy high-cost support must be used in a given area until June 30, 2020, at which time the Commission will evaluate whether an extension is warranted.

We have implemented other actions such as waiving our gift rules governing the RHC and E-Rate programs until September 30, 2020, to enable service providers to offer, and

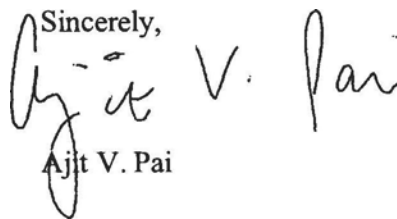
hospitals, schools, and libraries to solicit and accept, improved connections or additional equipment for telemedicine or remote learning during the coronavirus outbreak. And we have clarified that schools and libraries that are closed due to the COVID-19 outbreak are permitted to allow the general public to use E-Rate-supported Wi-Fi networks while on the school's campus or library property. These critical actions will make it easier for broadband providers to support telehealth and remote learning efforts during the pandemic.

The Commission also waived several rules last week that could otherwise result in de-enrollment of subscribers from the Lifeline program, which provides monthly discounts on broadband and voice services to qualified low-income consumers. The order waived the Lifeline program's usage requirements and general de-enrollment procedures until May 29, 2020. We previously waived the Lifeline program's recertification and reverification requirements for participating low-income consumers. In total, we are attempting to ease burdens on Lifeline subscribers and allow Lifeline carriers to focus their efforts on assisting customers.

Moreover, we have quickly granted Special Temporary Authority to AT&T, Sprint, T-Mobile, U.S. Cellular, and Verizon as well as a large number of wireless Internet service providers to use additional spectrum to meet customer demand for mobile broadband across the United States, including Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The Commission has granted Telecommunications Relay Service providers temporary waivers to better enable American Sign Language interpreters to work from home in order to maintain relay services during this national emergency for individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf-blind, or have a speech disability. And we've also sent out a reminder to authorized alert originators, including state and local governments, that the Wireless Emergency Alert system is available as a tool to provide life-saving information to the public during the COVID-19 outbreak.

The Commission is also hard at work fulfilling its mission to protect consumers. We recently launched a COVID-19 Consumer Warnings and Safety Tips webpage, <https://www.fcc.gov/covid-scams>, to alert consumers to the proliferation of scam phone calls and texts related to the coronavirus pandemic. Scammers are promoting bogus cures, offering fake test kits, sending hoax text messages, and generally preying on virus-related fears, and the Commission is doing all that it can to help consumers avoid these scams. And together with the Federal Trade Commission, we successfully demanded that three gateway providers stop bringing into the country COVID-19-related scam robocalls.

Finally, the Commission continues to work with Congress to secure the necessary authority and funding to enhance remote learning services and broadband connectivity in various cities and towns affected by the pandemic. I am thankful for this opportunity to work with you and your colleagues to serve the American public.

Sincerely,

Ajit V. Pai