

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 2, 2020

The Honorable Ajit Pai
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20536

Dear Chairman Pai:

In these unprecedented times, the work the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is doing to keep Americans connected in a time of crisis is critical. It is critical for the students learning from home, for the employees adapting to telework, and for the well-being of our economy. I applaud the steps the FCC has already taken to better connect Americans during the coronavirus outbreak, and I am hopeful that the FCC will approach the ongoing issue of orphan counties struggling to receive local news with the same vigor it has approached connectivity.

As you know, I have long advocated for the four counties in Georgia's Ninth Congressional District that are deemed "orphan counties" – Franklin, Elbert, Hart, and Stephens counties. These counties do not receive in-state programming, but instead receive their programming from our neighboring states, South Carolina and North Carolina. This means nearly 94,000 of my constituents are currently getting their "local" news from other states. In recent weeks, I've heard from several constituents worried they will miss an important coronavirus-related order issued by Georgia Governor Brian Kemp or that they will miss updates regarding the number of Georgians affected by this pandemic. It is unacceptable that Georgians cannot receive the information they need in the midst of a global health emergency simply because media conglomerates are weary to make the fix.

Since I first took office, I have been working with county officials and the FCC on this issue, and I was especially pleased when the FCC Media Bureau approved the applications of all four counties. However, three of the four applications from Georgia's orphan counties were appealed. The time we currently find ourselves in demands that the three applications left on appeal, and any petitions or related documentation that require review, are expeditiously considered to ensure that these Georgians can receive critical news on the pandemic from their own state government. In light of these circumstances, I ask for a response to the following questions:

- 1) What is the current status of the appeals for Franklin, Stephens, and Hart counties' applications?

- 2) How is the FCC altering its manner of processing these applications to ensure a timely decision during the pandemic?
- 3) When can the remaining orphan counties in Georgia expect a final decision on their application?
- 4) When can all four orphan counties in Georgia expect to receive Atlanta-based programming?
- 5) Is the FCC able to work with stations and satellite providers to provide affected Georgians with immediate access to Atlanta-based programming in light of Georgia's current State of Emergency declaration?

We can agree that all Georgians should have access to Georgia news, especially in a time like this. I look forward to receiving your responses to the questions above. In the interim, I urge the FCC, in conjunction with stations and satellite providers, to provide immediate access of Georgia channels to the 94,000 Georgians living in Franklin, Elbert, Hart, and Stephens counties.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. Please reach out to my office if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Doug Collins
Member of Congress