

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2004

April 24, 2020

The Honorable Ajit V. Pai
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
455 12th Street SW
Washington, D.C. 20544

Dear Chairman Pai:

We write to express our concern regarding the inability of our Western Maryland constituents in Garrett County to view programming originating from television stations in the State. As a result, residents of these communities lack access to Maryland news, politics, and local affairs. Now as COVID-19 spreads across the State, this lack of access has become a problem for public health that requires immediate attention.

At present, the local stations available in Garrett County originate in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania rather than Baltimore or Hagerstown, Maryland. What was once an inconvenience has become a special challenge in this crisis, as local and State officials need to disseminate information about the ongoing pandemic to protect the health and safety of Maryland residents.

We are aware that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has rules permitting broadcasters, multichannel video providers, and county governments the right to petition the agency for market modification to promote consumer access to television broadcast station signals that originate in their state of residence. We are concerned, however, that this process will take an unacceptably long time in light of the ongoing health crisis. Accordingly, we ask that the FCC work with our offices and officials from Garrett County to develop an emergency market modification providing access to Maryland news and affairs programming for the duration of the pandemic.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

/s/ Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

/s/ Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator