



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

May 29, 2020

OFFICE OF  
THE CHAIRMAN

The Honorable Anthony Brindisi  
U.S. House of Representatives  
329 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Brindisi:

Thank you for your letter regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and your recognition of the hard work the FCC has done. 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 noted in your letter, in order to ensure that Americans stay connected with broadband or telephone connectivity during the COVID-19 outbreak, I 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 Wi-Fi hotspots to any American who needs them. To date, over 700 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.

On April 30, I announced an extension of the Pledge, and have asked providers to extend these offerings to consumers and small businesses until June 30, 2020. Companies representing the vast majority of broadband and telephone subscribers have already agreed to this extension. I thank them for stepping up to the plate once again during this unprecedented national emergency, and I encourage others to do so as well.

Many of these same companies have gone above and beyond the Pledge and taken additional steps to maintain or expand connectivity during the pandemic. For example, I have asked broadband providers to increase speeds, 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.

Telehealth also has been a key Commission priority during the pandemic. As you may know, in March, 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. I'm thankful Congress included \$200 million in the CARES Act for the FCC to establish a COVID-19 Telehealth Program to help health care providers provide connected care services to patients at their homes or mobile locations. Following enactment of the CARES Act, I immediately presented my plan for the COVID-19 Telehealth Program to my fellow commissioners, and they unanimously voted to approve it. On April 2, 2020, the Commission released the Order formally establishing the Program. It will provide immediate support to eligible health care providers responding to the COVID-19 pandemic by fully funding their telecommunications services, information services, and devices necessary to provide critical connected care services until the program's \$200 million in funding has been expended or the COVID-19 pandemic has ended. Using a streamlined application process, the Commission will make decisions on applications as rapidly as possible on a rolling basis. And in making funding decisions, we have had and will continue to 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.

Early results are quite positive. In just a few weeks since the Commission stood up the Program and opened the Program application portal on April 13, we have received hundreds of applications. Unsurprisingly, there's tremendous interest in and demand for COVID-19 Telehealth Program funding for connected care services. Consistent with my intention for the Commission to make funding determinations as expeditiously as possible, we've already approved eight sets of funding requests since April 13, supporting 185 health care providers in 38 states for a total of \$68.22 million in funding. Health care providers in some of the hardest hit areas of New York have received funding to provide telehealth services, including organizations such as New York-Presbyterian Hospital, Mount Sinai Hospital, NYU Grossman School of Medicine, and NYU Langone Health in New York City, the Parker Jewish Institute for Health Care and Rehabilitation in New Hyde Park, the White Plains Hospital Medical Center in White Plains, and Hudson River HealthCare in Peekskill. As suggested above, the Commission will continue to evaluate applications and will distribute additional funding on a rolling basis.

The Commission has also taken a number of steps to help meet connectivity needs through the Universal Service Fund (USF). The USF comprises four major programs: the Rural Health Care Program, the E-Rate Program, the Lifeline Program, and the High-Cost Program. Below, I discuss our activities within each.

To begin, 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, which administers USF programs on the FCC's behalf. The Commission's action will help ensure that rural healthcare providers have the resources and flexibility they need to promote telehealth solutions for their patients.

With respect to the E-Rate Program, we've announced extensions of key 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.

We also have taken other actions in this area, 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.

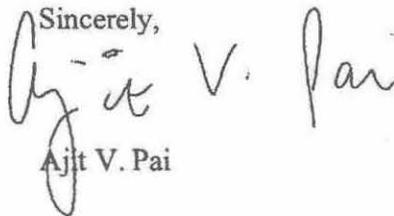
We've also been active with respect to the Lifeline Program, which provides monthly discounts on broadband and voice services to low-income consumers. To help ensure that Lifeline subscribers stay connected to these services during the COVID-19 crisis, the Commission has waived several rules through June 30, 2020 that could otherwise result in de-enrollment of subscribers from the program. We have also temporarily waived the requirement that consumers seeking to qualify for the program based on their income must provide at least three consecutive months of income documentation. This relief will make it easier for Americans who recently lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic and who qualify for Lifeline to enroll in the program. Commission staff will monitor the situation and determine whether any extensions of these Lifeline waivers beyond June 30, 2020 are needed.

Finally, with respect to the USF High-Cost Program, 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.

Aside from USF-related actions, the FCC has been busy updating its rules to help consumers be better served during the pandemic. For instance, 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. And we've provided relief to certain site-based and mobile-only wireless licensees with construction deadlines from March 15, 2020, through and including May 15, 2020. 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. We've also provided regulatory 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 broadband providers in order to work from home or access remote learning.

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