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anne.veigle@fcc.gov**For Immediate Release****FCC CHAIRMAN PAI URGES CONGRESS TO HELP CONSUMERS
STAY CONNECTED FOLLOWING END OF KEEP AMERICANS
CONNECTED PLEDGE ON JUNE 30*****Also Asks Broadband and Telephone Service Providers Not to Disconnect Customers
in July as Industry Transitions Out of Pledge***

WASHINGTON, June 19, 2020—Today, Federal Communications Commission Chairman Ajit Pai sent a letter to Congress seeking legislation to help consumers and small businesses stay connected over the coming months after the end of the Keep Americans Connected Pledge. While the Pledge expires on June 30, Pai informed Congress that he has asked companies not to disconnect consumers and small businesses who are behind on their bills due to the coronavirus pandemic in July, but instead offer the option of extended payment plans and deferred payment arrangements. He has also asked service providers in the coming months to maintain and expand their plans for low-income families and veterans as well as their remote learning plans for students.

“The Pledge has been an extraordinary success, and I commend the 785 service providers that have stepped up to the plate over the past three-and-a-half months to do the right thing during this national emergency. This public-private partnership has been critical to American consumers,” Pai said. “But broadband and telephone companies, especially small ones, cannot continue to provide service without being paid for an indefinite period of time; no business in any sector of our economy could. So I believe now is the time for legislation to ensure that doctors and patients, students and teachers, low-income families and veterans, those who have lost their jobs and livelihoods due to the pandemic and the accompanying lockdowns, those in our cities and those in the countryside—in short, all Americans—remain connected until this emergency ends. The Broadband Connectivity and Digital Equity Framework proposed by Chairman Roger Wicker of the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation of the U.S. Senate and Ranking Member Greg Walden of the Committee on Energy and Commerce of the U.S. House of Representatives is a forward-thinking proposal to do just that.”

In calls that Pai held with broadband and telephone service providers this week, many companies reported they have already committed to taking steps to keep Americans connected in coming months. They are placing customers into pro-rated payment plans of up to 12 months, deferring device payments, waiving a portion of customers’ unpaid balances, and working with customers on an individualized basis in cases of extraordinary hardship. For example, Charter is waiving a portion of the past due balance for customers who weren’t able to pay their broadband bill due to the pandemic. Comcast is keeping its Wi-Fi hotspots open to anyone who needs them through the

end of the year. Starry is providing free service to customers in low-income housing through the end of July. And Verizon is automatically enrolling customers who signed up for the Pledge into a program that will allow repayment of past due balances over time.

The FCC launched the Keep Americans Connected Pledge on March 13, and later extended the voluntary initiative to June 30. Nearly 800 broadband and telephone service providers agreed to (1) not 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) waive any late fees that any residential or small business customers incur because of their economic circumstances related to the coronavirus pandemic; and (3) open Wi-Fi hotspots to any American who needs them. In addition to these commitments, several companies took additional steps to maintain or expand connectivity during the pandemic.

The Keep Americans Connected Pledge is one of numerous FCC initiatives launched in recent months to help consumers during the coronavirus pandemic. For updates on these actions, visit: <https://www.fcc.gov/coronavirus>. For more information on the Keep Americans Connected Pledge, including the full list of signers, visit: <https://www.fcc.gov/keep-americans-connected>.

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