



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF  
THE CHAIRMAN

June 15, 2020

The Honorable Joe Manchin  
United States Senate  
306 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Manchin:

Thank you for your letter regarding the availability of high-speed broadband service in West Virginia, and the importance of collecting more accurate, precise, and granular broadband deployment data. I have seen for myself what broadband can do for a community—for its families, its schools, its hospitals, its farms, its businesses—as well as the impact of its absence. And as you note, the COVID-19 pandemic highlights the urgency of closing the digital divide. That's why we've taken aggressive steps to remove regulatory barriers to broadband deployment and reform our Universal Service Fund programs that support broadband deployment, both fixed and mobile. There has been tremendous progress over the last three years, but more work remains, and we continue to focus on making sure every American has access to digital opportunity.

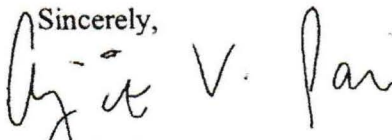
I agree that updated and accurate broadband deployment data is critical to bridging the digital divide. That's why the Commission launched the *Digital Opportunity Data Collection* last August to develop new granular, precise fixed and mobile broadband coverage maps. I was happy that Congress endorsed the approach to broadband mapping that the Commission adopted in August in the Broadband DATA Act earlier this year, and we anticipate moving forward in this rulemaking in the coming weeks so that these new data can inform our future efforts to fund rural broadband.

However, the Broadband DATA Act prohibits the Commission from relying on the Universal Service Administrative Company to assist the Commission with collecting coverage data from service providers and processing challenges to the maps crowdsourced from consumers on the ground. As we repeatedly warned Congress leading up to passage of the Broadband DATA Act, this prohibition means that we cannot complete our work on the maps until we have an independent appropriation to cover the significant costs of fulfilling the Commission's responsibilities under the law. Unfortunately, that has not happened. If Congress does not act soon, this well-intentioned legislation will have the unfortunate effect of delaying rather than expediting the development of better broadband maps.

It is vital for Congress to provide the FCC as soon as possible with the appropriations necessary to implement the Broadband DATA Act. Commission staff have determined that at least \$65 million is needed to provide start-up costs and to implement the measure for roughly one year, and staff have provided this request to the Appropriations Committees of the U.S.

Senate and House as well as the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee and the House Energy and Commerce Committee. I look forward to working with Congress in the near term to secure this funding, so that we can ensure that we have the best tools available for bridging the digital divide for the American people.

Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,  
  
Ajit V. Pai