



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF  
THE CHAIRMAN

August 18, 2020

The Honorable Mark Warner  
United States Senate  
703 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Warner:

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.

Specifically, 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. Over 700 broadband and telephone service providers across the country, including all of our nation's largest providers, took 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 asked providers to extend these offerings to consumers and small businesses until June 30, 2020. After that announcement, the number of companies covered by the Pledge increased, with over 780 companies taking the Pledge, representing the overwhelming majority of broadband and telephone subscribers in the country. Many of these same companies went above and beyond the Pledge and took additional steps to maintain or extend connectivity during the pandemic. I commend these providers for stepping up to the plate during this unprecedented national emergency.

For example, I had 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 was pleased with the response that I received. For example, Comcast increased broadband speeds for Internet Essentials (low-income) customers from 15 Mbps to 25 Mbps, offered broadband service for free for 60 days to new Internet Essentials customers, and offered all customers unlimited data for 60 days. AT&T provided all consumer home Internet wireline customers, as well as Fixed Wireless Internet customers, with unlimited

Access from AT&T customers two months of free service. Charter offered up to 100 Mbps broadband service for free for 60 days to new households with K-12 and/or college students and waived installation fees for such households. And Verizon offered low-cost 200 Mbps broadband to low-income households, waived voice and Internet charges for Lifeline customers for two billing cycles, and tripled 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 provided 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. Using a streamlined application process, the Commission made decisions on applications as rapidly as possible on a rolling basis. And in making funding decisions, we prioritized 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.

Over the past four months since the Commission established the COVID-19 Telehealth Program, we received several thousand applications; unsurprisingly, there was a tremendous interest in and demand for COVID-19 Telehealth Program funding for connected care services. On July 8, 2020, the Commission completed allocation of the full \$200 million to 539 applications from health providers in 47 states plus Washington, D.C. and Guam. The Commission appreciates the responsibility entrusted to us by the supporters of the CARES Act, including you, and I assure you that we spared no effort to make the COVID-19 Telehealth Program a success.

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 waived several rules that could otherwise have resulted 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. In light of the ongoing pandemic, Commission staff have extended these waivers until August 31, 2020.

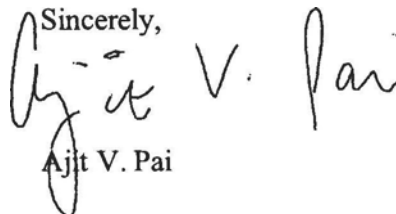
Finally, with respect to the USF High-Cost Program, the Commission also took action to give certain carriers flexibility to focus USF money on hard-hit areas, allowing competitive eligible telecommunications carriers to use their high-cost legacy support in the service areas of any affiliated eligible 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.

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 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. Specifically, in March 2020, the FCC decided to allow WISPs temporary access to 5.9 GHz spectrum and allow them to use the lower 45 megahertz of the band to help serve

their customers. To date, the FCC has granted STAs to more than 100 WISPs, and many of those providers have reported that the spectrum is helping to address the increased demand for broadband associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. And we 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 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 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 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. For instance, we 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 several gateway providers stop bringing into the country COVID-19-related scam robocalls.

Finally, the Commission will continue working on broadband initiatives I've proposed and which the Commission has adopted. For example, the establishment of the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund and the 5G Fund for Rural America. Both programs will ensure that rural Americans enjoy the same benefits from our increasingly digital economy as their urban counterparts. I appreciate your support of RDOF as well as our adoption of a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking on TV White Spaces devices. I'm also committed to working 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