

MICHAEL T. McCAUL

10TH DISTRICT, TEXAS

**RANKING MEMBER, COMMITTEE
ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

**COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY**

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4310

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WASHINGTON OFFICE:
2001 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-2401

AUSTIN OFFICE:
3301 NORTHLAND DR., SUITE 212
AUSTIN, TX 78731
(512) 473-2357

BRENNHAM OFFICE:
2000 SOUTH MARKET, SUITE 303
BRENNHAM, TX 77833
(979) 830-8497

TOMBALL OFFICE:
990 VILLAGE SQUARE, SUITE B
TOMBALL, TX 77375
(281) 255-8372

KATY OFFICE:
1773 WESTBOROUGH DRIVE, SUITE 223
KATY, TX 77449
(281) 398-1247

The Honorable Ajit Pai
Chairman, Federal Communications Commission
445 12th St, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Pai:

I applaud you and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) for all the steps you are taking to promote and enable internet access during the COVID-19 pandemic. Internet, particularly high-speed broadband, is desperately needed right now for essential services such as distance learning and telemedicine.

Rural communities, such as those in Texas' 10th District, are especially impacted by this crisis. In Washington, Waller, Lee, Fayette and Colorado counties I have received reports of families unable to provide distance learning to their children due to a lack of access, or unreliable broadband connections. Those who do have access are worried about paying their bills, while others with health conditions are seeking telemedicine options in order to avoid COVID-19 exposure at hospitals. Even some County employees are unable to work remotely because of unreliable connections. This is clearly adding additional stress and frustration to what is already an extremely difficult time for most Americans.

While I understand that closing the digital divide and bringing high-speed broadband to unserved areas like mine is not something that can be done overnight, I appreciate the steps you are taking to make a difference now.

I want to thank you for your swift reaction to this crisis by calling on internet service providers to keep telecommunication services connected, waive late fees and expand access to Wi-Fi hotspots. Hundreds of broadband service providers have now signed on to your Keep Americans Connected Pledge, helping low-income families and struggling businesses continue to access distance learning, health services and business opportunities. Additionally, I want to thank you for your recent call to extend that pledge until June 30, 2020.

I continue to be amazed by the American spirit during this time and am truly grateful for the generosity that companies and individuals have shown to help those in need. Unfortunately, many small service providers operating in rural communities cannot afford to honor this pledge. That is why I co-sponsored H.R 6394 asking Congress for a \$2 billion FCC emergency relief fund to help small broadband providers keep their customers connected during the COVID-19 pandemic.

I also want to express my appreciation for the actions that FCC has taken to waive the E-Rate and Rural Health Care gift rules so that schools and hospitals can now receive free broadband connections, service upgrades, Wi-Fi hotspots and networking devices to assist remote learning and telemedicine, particularly in underserved and unserved rural areas. Additionally, your work with the Department of Education to help equip students with broadband connectivity through the Education Stabilization Fund established under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act is an important step towards ensuring our students are able to continue their studies.

Finally, I commend the quick action your agency has taken to establish the \$200 million COVID-19 Telehealth Program through the CARES Act. This program is a critical resource for countless providers working to establish telehealth operations during this time. Still, with nearly all Americans now reliant on telemedicine, and many continuing to lack access to broadband, I have joined my colleagues in Congress to ask for additional funding for this program in any future COVID-19 related legislation. By continuing to fully fund the telecommunication services of eligible health care providers, we can bring necessary medical services to those in need while minimizing potential exposure to, and spread of, COVID-19.

While these are all important steps to deal with the current crisis, I urge you to continue to look for ways to expand high-speed broadband access to unserved and underserved areas, such as those in Texas' 10th District. Your ongoing commitment to this issue through multiple FCC Funds is now more critical than ever. I ask that you continue to work with me and my constituents to ensure that they have access to high-speed broadband now and in the future.

Sincerely,



Michael T. McCaul
Member of Congress