

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

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May 26, 2020

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

Dear Chairman Pai:

We write to request that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) provide an update on the status of communications networks in Puerto Rico and determine whether its residents have maintained reliable connectivity throughout the coronavirus pandemic. We are deeply concerned about the potential for continued communications disruptions, in light of recent outages following a series of earthquakes that struck the islands and the lingering impact of Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017 on its networks. Further, we seek clarification on your response to us regarding the recent earthquakes in Puerto Rico to determine whether both the island's immediate and long-term connectivity needs are met. The ability to remain connected is critical, but all the more critical during the pandemic.

On May 2, 2020, the U.S. Geological Survey reported that the islands of Puerto Rico experienced a 5.4 magnitude earthquake. This earthquake comes on the heels of 5.8 and 6.5 magnitude earthquakes which caused significant communications and electrical power outages in January. In addition withstanding this ongoing seismic activity, Puerto Rico's communications networks must be resilient entering the upcoming hurricane season and while its people experience social distancing and shelter-in place mandates.

We continue to worry that Puerto Rico's communications networks never fully recovered following Hurricanes Irma and Maria. In your response to our inquiry, dated February 14, 2020, describing the status of Puerto Rico's networks following the January earthquakes, you describe the additional funding the FCC provided to rebuild more resilient networks over a ten-year period. However, you noted that these funds will not be available until later this year. While we appreciate that the FCC is providing this long-term funding, we are also concerned about the immediate connectivity needs of the islands for the 2020 hurricane season during the pandemic. We request that the FCC provide an assessment of the current ability of the networks to withstand hurricanes, earthquakes and the pandemic, and the combined impacts thereof.

Further, your response referenced “the lessons [the island’s telecommunications carriers] learned from Hurricane Maria” and how they “used them to develop more resilient networks[.]” As many areas of the country will be vulnerable to hurricanes and the pandemic, please provide details about the lessons learned by the FCC and telecommunications carriers after Hurricanes Irma and Maria. In particular, we request information on how the FCC has documented and disseminated these lessons to telecommunications carriers and any data collected and analysis conducted by the FCC to determine the efficacy of those lessons.

We appreciate your attention to this important matter. Please provide a response by June 5, 2020. Should you have any questions regarding this letter, please contact Christopher Cox in Congresswoman Yvette D. Clarke's office at Christopher.Cox@mail.house.gov.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Yvette D. Clarke, M.C. in black ink.

Yvette D. Clarke
Member of Congress

Handwritten signature of Raul Ruiz, M.D. in blue ink.

Raul Ruiz, M.D.
Member of Congress

Handwritten signature of Anna G. Eshoo in blue ink.

Anna G. Eshoo
Member of Congress

Handwritten signature of Darren Soto in blue ink.

Darren Soto
Member of Congress