



OFFICE OF  
THE CHAIRMAN

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

August 25, 2020

The Honorable Yvette D. Clarke  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2058 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congresswoman Clarke:

Thank you for your letter regarding the status of telecommunications connectivity in the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as lingering effects of the 2017 Hurricane Season (Hurricanes Irma and Maria) and earthquakes that impacted the island and its telecommunications infrastructure in January and May 2020.

The response of telecommunications providers to these challenges has vastly improved since the 2017 Hurricane Season. In stark contrast to the communications breakdown during and immediately after the 2017 Hurricane Season, the Commission has not received reports of widespread and lengthy outages. The rapid recovery after the January 2020 earthquakes was due in no small part to the extraordinary restoration efforts of the island's telecommunications carriers, which took the lessons they learned from Hurricane Maria and used them to develop more resilient networks as well as a recovery strategy that relied upon sector collaboration, as opposed to being carrier-based. For example, investments in resilience have paid off; fiber that had been buried underground in Puerto Rico proved to be more resilient than aerial fiber strung on utility poles, particularly in locations with high replace/repair costs or where crews could not reach and access facilities. Those networks appear to have held up well this year, which is a great benefit to consumers in the territory.

That's in large part because of the collaborative work of the Commission and service providers on the island. After the 2017 Hurricane Season, the Commission and the telecommunications industry reflected on how each could have responded more successfully. The Commission issued the *2017 Atlantic Hurricane Season Report*, which describes Commission actions leading up to, during, and in the aftermath of various hurricanes, and includes next steps of how both the Commission and industry could do a better job in the future. We convened a workshop on identifying critical information needs to improve communications during disasters, which included members of the Puerto Rico Public Service Regulatory Board and the Puerto Rico Emergency Management Agency. We established a Disaster Response and Recovery Working Group as part of the Commission's Broadband Deployment Advisory Committee, as well as a working group of the FCC's Intergovernmental Affairs Committee to review disaster response and recovery. And I personally visited Puerto Rico twice, first in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Maria and then in March 2018. On these visits, among other things, I met with the then-Governor of Puerto Rico, heard from a wide variety of telecommunications, power, and consumer stakeholders at a roundtable convened by

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As with all emergency situations, we have drawn lessons from the 2017 Hurricane Season to help inform our preparedness efforts and future incident response. The unique aspects of responding to disasters in remote areas, such as hilly, rural parts of Puerto Rico, highlighted several key areas of preparedness. Here, satellite communications and high frequency (HF) radio, such as amateur radio, take on greater significance for more isolated areas (*e.g.*, hospitals using HF radio, retailers connecting through satellites for EBT/credit card payments). Related to this, logistics and pre-staging of equipment become both more challenging and more important in remote or island locations where there is no “staging space” just outside the impact area, as there typically is in the mainland U.S. We continue to encourage communications providers on all platforms to have situational awareness of fuel, access, and security.

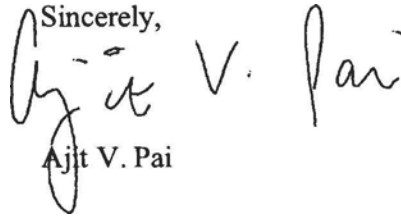
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And of course, the Commission responded by creating the Uniendo a Puerto Rico Fund to aid the rebuilding and hardening of the island’s networks. As of September 2019, the Commission already had provided roughly \$108.7 million in additional, one-time Universal Service Fund support to assist with network restoration in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Further, the FCC approved \$234 million in universal service funds for Puerto Rico and USVI on June 15, 2020 to expand, improve, and harden mobile broadband networks on the islands, including more than \$58 million for deploying 5G wireless networks in Puerto Rico—the first Commission-funded 5G networks anywhere in the country.

On August 6, the Commission’s Wireline Competition Bureau announced that service providers could begin filing applications for more than \$500 million in Universal Service Fund support available to deploy fixed broadband networks across the Commonwealth. That same day, the Bureau also released an order reducing the size of letters of credit that applicants must provide in order to receive funding. This will mean that applicants will spend less on bank fees and other costs of financing and focus on deploying broadband, and will ensure that smaller providers that could have a harder time securing large letters of credit will be able to compete for funding in Puerto Rico. The application window for funding will close on September 3, and we expect to announce winning bidders later this fall.

Through the Uniendo a Puerto Rico Fund, the FCC continues to work toward the long-term resiliency of the networks in the territories. Challenges remain, of course. But the Commission will continue to meet its long-term commitment to facilitate the deployment and expansion of high-speed, storm-hardened networks throughout the territory.

I appreciate your interest in this matter. Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,  
  
Ajit V. Pai



OFFICE OF  
THE CHAIRMAN

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

August 25, 2020

The Honorable Anna G. Eshoo  
U.S. House of Representatives  
202 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congresswoman Eshoo:

Thank you for your letter regarding the status of telecommunications connectivity in the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as lingering effects of the 2017 Hurricane Season (Hurricanes Irma and Maria) and earthquakes that impacted the island and its telecommunications infrastructure in January and May 2020.

The response of telecommunications providers to these challenges has vastly improved since the 2017 Hurricane Season. In stark contrast to the communications breakdown during and immediately after the 2017 Hurricane Season, the Commission has not received reports of widespread and lengthy outages. The rapid recovery after the January 2020 earthquakes was due in no small part to the extraordinary restoration efforts of the island's telecommunications carriers, which took the lessons they learned from Hurricane Maria and used them to develop more resilient networks as well as a recovery strategy that relied upon sector collaboration, as opposed to being carrier-based. For example, investments in resilience have paid off; fiber that had been buried underground in Puerto Rico proved to be more resilient than aerial fiber strung on utility poles, particularly in locations with high replace/repair costs or where crews could not reach and access facilities. Those networks appear to have held up well this year, which is a great benefit to consumers in the territory.

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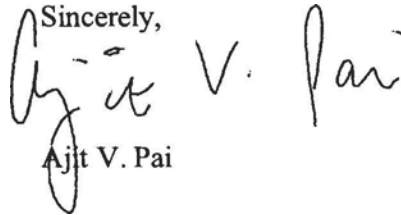
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Ajit V. Pai



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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

August 25, 2020

The Honorable Raul Ruiz  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2342 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Ruiz:

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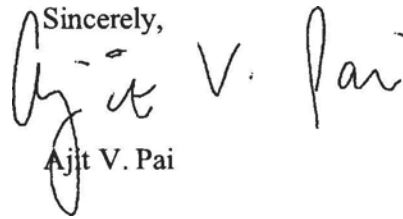
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WASHINGTON

August 25, 2020

The Honorable Darren Soto  
U.S. House of Representatives  
1429 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

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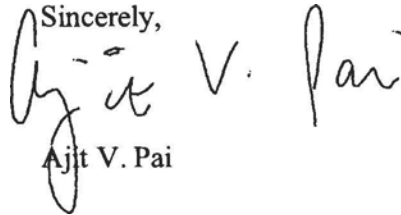
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