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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE,
AND TRANSPORTATION

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6125

WEBSITE: <http://commerce.senate.gov>

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JOHN KEAST, STAFF DIRECTOR
DAVID STRICKLAND, DEMOCRATIC STAFF DIRECTOR

October 28, 2020

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

Dear Chairman Pai,

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed life dramatically for almost every American. Normal activities such as work, school, and health care services now increasingly take place online. According to one estimate, average broadband usage has risen by 47 percent since the pandemic began.

Through initiatives led by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC or Commission) and private investment, a number of steps have been taken to expand broadband access to unserved areas and to address immediate connectivity needs stemming from the COVID-19 crisis. Notably, the FCC's 2020 Broadband Deployment Report finds that the number of households without access to broadband service continues to decline. Despite these encouraging advances, there is still significant work that needs to be done to connect all Americans.

As you know, timely, reasonable, and equitable access to utility poles is a critical part of expanding the availability of reliable and high-speed broadband internet service. Indeed, the Telecommunications Act of 1996 requires utilities to provide nondiscriminatory access to utility poles as they are essential to the efficient deployment of broadband facilities. The Act also requires the FCC to adopt procedures to ensure that the rates, terms, and conditions for pole attachments are just and reasonable.

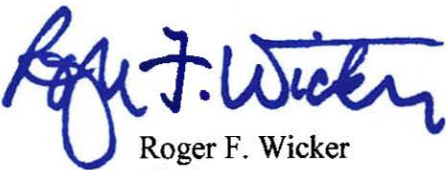
In accordance with the law, we encourage the FCC to move expeditiously to clarify rules governing broadband providers' access to utility poles and to resolve quickly any pole attachment disputes that arise in unserved areas. These actions would help remove impediments to broadband deployment and allow more resources to be devoted to connecting homes and businesses across the country.

We appreciate the FCC's ongoing work to reduce costs and remove regulatory barriers in order to close the digital divide. Thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,



John Barrasso, M.D.
Chairman
Senate Committee on Environment
and Public Works



Roger F. Wicker
Chairman
Senate Committee on Commerce,
Science, and Transportation