

Congress of the United States
Washington, D.C. 20515

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September 2, 2020

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

Dear Chairman Pai,

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for all Americans to have access to reliable high-speed internet service for online learning, remote work, telehealth, and to stay connected with family and friends. As many as 18.3 million Americans are believed to still be without access to broadband, including nearly 1 in 4 Americans in rural areas. Now is the time for urgency. By removing unnecessary statutory and regulatory impediments, the FCC can speed broadband deployment in under-served parts of our country.

In the Telecommunications Act of 1996, Congress recognized that communications providers needed fair rules to obtain access to utility poles. Congress granted broad authority to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to craft regulations that would balance the rights and responsibilities of pole owners with those who need to attach to them. It is time for the FCC to clarify its rules to ensure that the rules – and the process for enforcing them – remain fair, equitable, transparent, and, most importantly, encourage accelerated deployment of high-speed internet service in rural areas.

With much of the country's rural broadband infrastructure carried by utility poles, the rules governing how broadband companies attach to poles are critical to deploying broadband. It is our understanding that these costs can wind up consisting of as much as 35 percent of the total cost of a rural broadband expansion project, and that does not even count the considerable time delays to building the infrastructure that can occur when broadband companies don't receive pole permits in a timely fashion. We are concerned that the current process of adding new broadband infrastructure to these poles is unnecessarily delaying -- and even preventing -- rural buildout.

To address these concerns, we encourage the Commission to act immediately, using its authority to clarify its rules for attaching broadband infrastructure to utility poles and eliminating this barrier to deployment. A transparent, fair, fast process for accessing utility poles would allow investments in rural broadband to reach more unserved homes and businesses and to do so faster. Every American deserves access to high-speed internet, and rural populations have been left behind for far too long. As our country works to recover from the COVID crisis, broadband infrastructure investments can help accelerate our economy not only by the jobs created through these deployments, but by connecting millions of Americans to education, healthcare, and jobs. Thank you for your full and fair consideration.

Sincerely,



Anthony Gonzalez
Member of Congress



Darin LaHood
Member of Congress