



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF THE
ACTING CHAIRWOMAN

April 9, 2021

The Honorable Mike Quigley
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government
U.S. House of Representatives
2000 Rayburn House Office Building (G Floor)
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Quigley:

On October 1, 2020, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a report entitled "FCC Should Enhance Performance Goals and Measures for Its Program to Support Broadband Service in High-Cost Areas" (Report). The Report examines the extent to which the Commission's universal service high-cost program's performance goals and measures align with GAO's leading practices.

In the report, GAO makes four recommendations to improve the Commission's performance goals and measures for the high-cost program, including: (1) revising the high-cost performance goals so that they are measurable and quantifiable; (2) ensuring that high-cost performance measures align with performance goals and have specified targets; (3) ensuring that the high-cost performance measure for the Commission's goal of minimizing the universal service contribution burden on consumers and businesses takes into account user fee leading practices, such as equity and sustainability considerations; and (4) publicly and periodically reporting on the progress the Commission has made in meeting high-cost program performance goals. GAO also highlighted three stakeholder-identified challenges in meeting those goals, including: (1) the accuracy of the Commission's broadband deployment data; (2) the availability of broadband in Tribal lands; and (3) maintaining existing fixed voice infrastructure and attaining universal mobile service.

In their September 17, 2020 response to the draft report, the Managing Director and Chief of the Wireline Competition Bureau noted that the Commission has adopted targeted performance goals and measures for specific high-cost support mechanisms. The response acknowledged, however, that the Commission has not revisited the overarching performance goals and measures that were adopted nearly ten years ago and that they may no longer align with GAO's leading practices or how the Commission evaluates performance today. The response committed to recommending that the Commission revisit the overarching performance measures as part of ongoing and future proceedings involving the high-cost program. It also

highlighted some of the Commission's efforts to address the challenges identified by stakeholders.

These issues involving the high-cost support system are important because they provide a foundation for the extension of broadband service across the country. In fact, the need for ubiquitous and affordable high-speed internet service has never been clearer than during the ongoing pandemic. For many people, work, school, health care, and key elements of day-to-day life have moved online. But far too many have struggled without the connectivity they need during the pandemic, including as many as 17 million students who fall into the Homework Gap and have been shut out of the virtual classroom. These issues need to be addressed because we need to find ways to get 100 percent of us connected nationwide.

As part of this effort, at the Commission we have begun the critical work of implementing long-overdue upgrades to improve our broadband mapping data. The best time to start this work would have been several years ago. However, the second-best time to do this is right now. To this end, we are working to improve the data collection efforts at the agency, including the state of deployment in rural communities and on Tribal lands. We are also committed to seeing these efforts through in order to bring the benefits of advanced telecommunications services to all Americans. As part of these efforts, the Commission must ensure that scarce federal resources are being used efficiently and effectively. GAO's recommendations are intended to do just that—and we will keep them in mind as the Commission implements changes to the high-cost program.

I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the Report and would be happy to discuss further if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

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Jessica Rosenworcel



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF THE
ACTING CHAIRWOMAN

April 9, 2021

The Honorable Steve Womack
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government
U.S. House of Representatives
1016 Longworth Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Ranking Member Womack:

On October 1, 2020, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a report entitled "FCC Should Enhance Performance Goals and Measures for Its Program to Support Broadband Service in High-Cost Areas" (Report). The Report examines the extent to which the Commission's universal service high-cost program's performance goals and measures align with GAO's leading practices.

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OFFICE OF THE
ACTING CHAIRWOMAN

April 9, 2021

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
Chair
Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
United States Senate
512 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Madam Chair:

On October 1, 2020, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a report entitled “FCC Should Enhance Performance Goals and Measures for Its Program to Support Broadband Service in High-Cost Areas” (Report). The Report examines the extent to which the Commission’s universal service high-cost program’s performance goals and measures align with GAO’s leading practices.

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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
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April 9, 2021

The Honorable Roger Wicker
Ranking Member
Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
United States Senate
425 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Ranking Member Wicker:

On October 1, 2020, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a report entitled “FCC Should Enhance Performance Goals and Measures for Its Program to Support Broadband Service in High-Cost Areas” (Report). The Report examines the extent to which the Commission’s universal service high-cost program’s performance goals and measures align with GAO’s leading practices.

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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
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April 9, 2021

The Honorable Frank Pallone
Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Pallone:

On October 1, 2020, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a report entitled “FCC Should Enhance Performance Goals and Measures for Its Program to Support Broadband Service in High-Cost Areas” (Report). The Report examines the extent to which the Commission’s universal service high-cost program’s performance goals and measures align with GAO’s leading practices.

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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
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OFFICE OF THE
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April 9, 2021

The Honorable Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Ranking Member
Committee on Energy and Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives
2322A Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Ranking Member McMorris Rodgers:

On October 1, 2020, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a report entitled “FCC Should Enhance Performance Goals and Measures for Its Program to Support Broadband Service in High-Cost Areas” (Report). The Report examines the extent to which the Commission’s universal service high-cost program’s performance goals and measures align with GAO’s leading practices.

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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
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April 9, 2021

The Honorable Gary Peters
Chairman
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
United States Senate
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Peters:

On October 1, 2020, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a report entitled “FCC Should Enhance Performance Goals and Measures for Its Program to Support Broadband Service in High-Cost Areas” (Report). The Report examines the extent to which the Commission’s universal service high-cost program’s performance goals and measures align with GAO’s leading practices.

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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
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OFFICE OF THE
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April 9, 2021

The Honorable Rob Portman
Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
United States Senate
442 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Ranking Member Portman:

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April 9, 2021

The Honorable Carolyn B. Maloney
Chairwoman
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
U.S. House of Representatives
2157 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Maloney:

On October 1, 2020, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a report entitled "FCC Should Enhance Performance Goals and Measures for Its Program to Support Broadband Service in High-Cost Areas" (Report). The Report examines the extent to which the Commission's universal service high-cost program's performance goals and measures align with GAO's leading practices.

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2471 Rayburn House Office Building
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Dear Ranking Member Comer:

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In the report, GAO makes four recommendations to improve the Commission’s performance goals and measures for the high-cost program, including: (1) revising the high-cost performance goals so that they are measurable and quantifiable; (2) ensuring that high-cost performance measures align with performance goals and have specified targets; (3) ensuring that the high-cost performance measure for the Commission’s goal of minimizing the universal service contribution burden on consumers and businesses takes into account user fee leading practices, such as equity and sustainability considerations; and (4) publicly and periodically reporting on the progress the Commission has made in meeting high-cost program performance goals. GAO also highlighted three stakeholder-identified challenges in meeting those goals, including: (1) the accuracy of the Commission’s broadband deployment data; (2) the availability of broadband in Tribal lands; and (3) maintaining existing fixed voice infrastructure and attaining universal mobile service.

In their September 17, 2020 response to the draft report, the Managing Director and Chief of the Wireline Competition Bureau noted that the Commission has adopted targeted performance goals and measures for specific high-cost support mechanisms. The response acknowledged, however, that the Commission has not revisited the overarching performance goals and measures that were adopted nearly ten years ago and that they may no longer align with GAO’s leading practices or how the Commission evaluates performance today. The response committed to recommending that the Commission revisit the overarching performance measures as part of ongoing and future proceedings involving the high-cost program. It also highlighted some of the Commission’s efforts to address the challenges identified by stakeholders.

These issues involving the high-cost support system are important because they provide a foundation for the extension of broadband service across the country. In fact, the need for ubiquitous and affordable high-speed internet service has never been clearer than during the ongoing pandemic. For many people, work, school, health care, and key elements of day-to-day life have moved online. But far too many have struggled without the connectivity they need during the pandemic, including as many as 17 million students who fall into the Homework Gap and have been shut out of the virtual classroom. These issues need to be addressed because we need to find ways to get 100 percent of us connected nationwide.

As part of this effort, at the Commission we have begun the critical work of implementing long-overdue upgrades to improve our broadband mapping data. The best time to start this work would have been several years ago. However, the second-best time to do this is right now. To this end, we are working to improve the data collection efforts at the agency, including the state of deployment in rural communities and on Tribal lands. We are also committed to seeing these efforts through in order to bring the benefits of advanced telecommunications services to all Americans. As part of these efforts, the Commission must ensure that scarce federal resources are being used efficiently and effectively. GAO's recommendations are intended to do just that—and we will keep them in mind as the Commission implements changes to the high-cost program.

I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the Report and would be happy to discuss further if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

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Jessica Rosenworcel



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF THE
ACTING CHAIRWOMAN

April 9, 2021

The Honorable Chris Van Hollen
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government
United States Senate
S-128 The Capital Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Van Hollen:

On October 1, 2020, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a report entitled “FCC Should Enhance Performance Goals and Measures for Its Program to Support Broadband Service in High-Cost Areas” (Report). The Report examines the extent to which the Commission’s universal service high-cost program’s performance goals and measures align with GAO’s leading practices.

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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF THE
ACTING CHAIRWOMAN

April 9, 2021

The Honorable Cindy Hyde-Smith
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government
United States Senate
125 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Ranking Member Hyde-Smith:

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