



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF THE
ACTING CHAIRWOMAN

August 30, 2021

The Honorable Joe Manchin
United States Senate
306 Hart House Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Manchin:

Thank you for your letter regarding the Federal Communications Commission's efforts to collect more precise and reliable broadband deployment data. Even before the global spread of COVID-19, it was apparent that broadband service is no longer a luxury but a necessity for school, jobs, healthcare, and so much more in modern life. But this pandemic has made it clearer than ever before that we have work to do to close the digital divide so that 100 percent of households in the United States are connected to high-speed internet service.

In too many communities across the country, adequate broadband is simply not available. I know this firsthand from the time I spent with you in West Virginia in 2019. I believe this shortfall needs to be addressed and I share your commitment to making sure that everyone, everywhere in the United States—including all West Virginians—has access to affordable, high-speed, and reliable broadband service, no matter who they are or where they live.

As Congress recognized with passage of the Broadband DATA Act in March 2020, if we want to ensure service nationwide, we need to have accurate information about where broadband is and is not across the country. However, the data and maps historically used by the FCC to indicate the presence of high-speed service have real deficiencies. For too long, the agency relied on a methodology that does not result in a full picture of where service is and is not in each community. That's because the Commission simply collected data from fixed broadband service providers and assumed that if there was service deployed anywhere in a census block, then broadband was available throughout the census block. We know now that this systematically overstated the presence of service in many areas, especially in rural communities where census blocks typically cover larger tracts of land.

In my first meeting as Acting Chairwoman, I made clear that improving the state of our nation's broadband data would be an FCC priority and announced the formation of the Broadband Data Task Force. The Task Force is leading the agency effort to implement the requirements of the Broadband DATA Act and kick-start our work to measure more accurately our nation's broadband needs. This includes expediting and coordinating the design and construction of new systems for collecting and verifying broadband deployment data.

These efforts have already yielded results. Guided by the work of the Task Force, the agency recently awarded a contract for development of the broadband data collection system required to accept broadband availability data from service providers and other entities, to map that data and make it public, to receive, track, and resolve challenges to submitted data, and to incorporate crowdsourced data from the FCC Speed Test app and other sources. We also issued

a Request for Information and subsequent Request for Proposal to seek vendors capable of building the Broadband Serviceable Location Fabric, a common dataset of all locations in the United States where fixed broadband internet access service can be installed, as required under Section 802(b)(1)(B) of the Broadband DATA Act. We are currently working to complete our review of vendor proposals in response to this effort. In addition, the FCC just published a new map demonstrating mobile coverage using data from our nation's largest wireless providers. This represents a significant improvement over other data previously offered by the agency because it represents the first true apples-to-apples comparison showing where customers can expect to receive 4G LTE broadband service based on propagation modeling from each provider created using standardized modeling parameters. Moreover, this map was designed as a preview of how the Broadband DATA Act mobile data will eventually look when the agency completes its duties under the law.

On top of these efforts, we are exploring how broader input from consumers can improve the data collected by the agency. To this end, the FCC has released a Public Notice seeking comment on technical rules that will govern the mobile challenge, verification, and crowdsource processes required under the Broadband DATA Act. In the meantime, we have encouraged consumers to download the FCC's Speed Test app, which in addition to providing them with information about their mobile broadband service, will be used to help verify and supplement the broadband availability data we collect from providers. We also are working on a procurement to augment the FCC Speed Test app to incorporate new capabilities that will allow consumers to file challenges and submit crowdsourced broadband availability data to the Commission in the future.

On that note, I appreciate your sharing with the Commission real-world broadband performance data gathered from your constituents throughout the state of West Virginia. I know they have a lot of knowledge about where service is and is not in the places where they live, and our new effort to incorporate challenge data is designed to provide them with a more formal opportunity to offer this input to the agency.

In addition to developing systems and processes for data collection, validation, and verification, the Task Force has also been working to expand consumer outreach efforts regarding broadband data gathering. This includes a new web-based portal for consumers to share their broadband experiences and provide information about their efforts to secure service (<https://www.fcc.gov/BroadbandData>). Since opening the portal, we have heard from over 12,200 Americans about their personal experiences with broadband service. The data show that far too many consumers are unable to access the service speeds they need and often lack alternative options. The speed tests that you have submitted on behalf of your constituents, together with the data we receive from this portal, will help to inform the direction of our work as we build out the full broadband data collection systems and processes.

Thank you also for raising the recent filing by the Competitive Carriers Association (CCA) regarding the areas that were eligible for support in the recent Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) auction. In light of this filing and other similar reports suggesting that the RDOF auction, as originally conceived, would fund broadband in some non-rural locations like parking lots, international airports, and dense urban centers, I directed FCC staff to conduct an analysis of this issue. Their work was guided, in part, by the locations of the speed test data relied on in the CCA filing. As a result, Commission staff have sent a letter to every RDOF awardee that preliminarily was offered funding in such areas in order to ensure that they are aware of this issue, remind them of the program's clear intent to focus on unserved areas, and clarify that if they decide to not seek support in these locations, we will entertain waivers of the Commission's

default rules. In short, these letters provide an opportunity to withdraw funding requests from places that already have service or where significant questions of waste have been raised.

I appreciate your interest in the work of the Commission to close the digital divide in West Virginia—and nationwide. I look forward to working with you and others in Congress as we continue to improve the Commission’s broadband deployment data. I know our progress on this is important and would be happy to provide your office with regular updates on our efforts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jessica Rosenworcel", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jessica Rosenworcel