



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF THE
CHAIRWOMAN

December 28, 2021

The Honorable Brian Higgins
U.S. House of Representatives
2459 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Higgins:

Thank you for your letter regarding the efforts of the Federal Communications Commission to collect more precise and reliable broadband deployment data. Even before the global spread of COVID-19, broadband service had become vital for school, work, healthcare, and more. The pandemic has only magnified the need for high-speed connections and in the process has exposed that too many in the United States do not have access to broadband today. The FCC is committed to implementing its new Broadband Data Collection process as fast as possible, consistent with all requirements of the Broadband DATA Act, so that federal, state, and local resources can be targeted to finally and fully connect everyone and everywhere to high-speed, reliable broadband service.

As Congress recognized with passage of the Broadband DATA Act, the first step necessary to connect all is developing accurate information about where broadband service is and is not available across the country. With better data we can more precisely target our policymaking efforts and financial resources, including the FCC's universal service funding and the funding included in the recently enacted Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, to those areas where support is needed most. Better data will also help other federal agencies, state and local governments, and Tribal entities target their own efforts.

We have talked about this problem for years but lacked the necessary focus and determination to get it done. The good news is that at the end of last year, Congress provided the FCC with the appropriation to fund implementation of the Broadband DATA Act. This made it possible for the agency to develop the complex databases, systems, and processes required to collect, validate, and make available broadband availability data. After I became Acting Chairwoman, the first action I took was to assess the status of this effort. While this review made clear we had an enormous amount of work to do, I am pleased to report that we have made significant progress.

In my first meeting as Acting Chairwoman, I announced the formation of the Broadband Data Task Force to coordinate and expedite the design and construction of new systems for collecting and verifying broadband deployment data. The Task Force is leading a cross-agency effort to implement the requirements of the Broadband DATA Act and kick-start our work to more accurately measure and reflect our nation's broadband needs.

Following the creation of the Task Force, we have made significant progress on standing-up the new Broadband Data Collection systems and processes. For example, we retained an expert data architect to work with the Commission’s own data and IT systems specialists to design and build a prototype of a data flow structure and system for the Broadband Data Collection, and on July 2, 2021 awarded a contract to build that data platform. The platform will consist of a complex, interrelated set of geospatial information systems and processes to collect deployment data from internet service providers, as well as verified coverage data from federal, state, local, and Tribal entities, and other third parties, along with challenge data and crowdsourced data. I am pleased to report that IT system development and testing is moving ahead on a very tight schedule and our decision to contract with the same firm to build the IT platform and systems will create efficiencies that save a significant amount of development time. There is still additional system development work, including user acceptance testing and independent verification and validation, left to complete prior to launching the Broadband Data Collection system, but we are moving forward as quickly as possible.

At the same time, the FCC has worked to procure the Broadband Serviceable Location Fabric, which is an essential foundation for improved broadband data gathering at the agency. It involves a common dataset of all locations in the United States where fixed broadband internet access service can be installed. Building the Fabric is specifically required in the Broadband DATA Act. The FCC began by issuing a Request for Information to collect information to develop a solicitation for the Fabric. Then, as specifically required in the Broadband DATA Act, we used the traditional government procurement process to seek competitive bids for the Fabric itself. This was done consistent with the Federal Acquisition Regulation. As a result, the agency issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) on June 1, which, among other things, specified that the chosen vendor would be required to deliver an initial production version of the Fabric within 120 days of the award. Responses to the RFP were due on July 1. However, the FCC received a pre-award protest filed with GAO following the RFP response deadline, which the agency worked to quickly resolve by issuing a revised RFP to all offerors on August 13. Revised proposals were due August 26 and we expeditiously reviewed these highly technical and detailed responses in a manner consistent with government solicitation practices. Following this review, the FCC awarded the contract for the Fabric development on November 9 to CostQuest Associates.

Since that time, one of the unsuccessful bidders filed a post-award protest with GAO. This is permitted under the Federal Acquisition Regulation process that the agency is required to follow for the procurement of the Fabric pursuant to the Broadband DATA Act. Under this process, FCC efforts to proceed with the Fabric have been stayed while the GAO has 100 days to issue a decision on the protest. Under the law, we are required to wait for GAO to proceed any further with the Fabric. If Congress wishes to identify a legislative way to expedite this process, the agency will provide whatever further information is necessary to assist.

In the interim, the FCC is working to address all remaining legal and policy issues associated with implementing the challenge, crowdsource, and verification processes required under the Broadband DATA Act. This entails establishing the methods through which consumers, state, local, and Tribal governmental entities, and other third parties may submit coverage data to challenge—and thereby improve—the accuracy of the Broadband Data Collection maps. On July 16, the FCC Broadband Data Task Force, Wireless Telecommunications Bureau, Office of Economics and Analytics, and Office of Engineering and

Technology, issued a Public Notice seeking comment on the technical requirements for processing mobile broadband challenge and verification data—including processing of state and local government submissions. While the end-user requirements for stakeholders to participate in the mobile challenge process are relatively simple, the methodologies and statistical analyses that will need to go on “under the hood” at the agency are complex. Therefore, in addition to the detailed descriptions set forth in the Public Notice and accompanying technical appendix, the Task Force also hosted an online webinar on August 12, to explain these proposals and respond to questions from stakeholders. Comments responding to the Public Notice were due by September 10, and reply comments were due by September 27. FCC staff are reviewing the record produced in response to this Public Notice and developing final specifications to ensure that the mobile challenge, verification, and crowdsourcing processes will improve the FCC’s data on mobile broadband availability and serve the purposes envisioned in the Broadband DATA Act.

We also have stepped up our consumer outreach efforts to inform stakeholders of the progress made to date and to provide status updates on future work. We created a new public-facing website (<https://www.fcc.gov/BroadbandData>), which provides a go-to source for FCC orders, public notices, and other educational materials as they become available. As a component of this website, we have created a new public portal through which consumers can share their broadband experiences to help inform the work of the Task Force.

In addition, we are encouraging people across the country to download the FCC Speed Test app, which is currently used to collect speed test data as part of the FCC’s Measuring Broadband America program. The app allows consumers to test the performance of their mobile broadband networks, and provides the test results to the FCC while protecting the privacy and confidentiality of users. It already has been downloaded by consumers more than 200,000 times. The FCC recently executed a contract modification with the app developer to update the app so that it can be used in the future as a platform for consumers to challenge provider-submitted maps when the Broadband Data Collection systems are available.

We are also continuing to talk directly with stakeholders, including state, local, and Tribal governmental entities, to ensure that they are prepared and able to participate in the data collection, challenge, and verification processes. We have engaged in discussions with a number of states and other governmental partners about the data collection systems we are developing and the challenge data that will help us verify the accuracy of our broadband availability maps. We also hosted an initial online workshop for Tribal governments on December 8 to provide information about the Broadband Data Collection program and technical assistance on the procedures that Tribes will use to submit primary broadband availability data. As our systems and data specifications are finalized, we will continue to reach out to state, local, and Tribal partners to ensure that they are aware of the types and formats of data we will need to ensure a consistent and standardized nationwide collection. At the same time, we are engaged in further procurement efforts to retain outside resources to assist the FCC in providing technical assistance to small internet service providers as well as to participants in the challenge process, as required under the Broadband DATA Act.

While all of these efforts are underway, we are also working with several broadband providers to use their coverage data and underlying propagation calculations to build and test the

Broadband Data Collection IT systems we are developing. In doing so, we have created a public FCC map that shows, for the first time, the state of nationwide 4G LTE mobile coverage based on data voluntarily submitted by AT&T Mobility, T-Mobile, UScellular, and Verizon. What is important to note is that this prototype, unlike wireless maps the agency has worked on before, is based on carriers using the same key input parameters to model their 4G LTE network coverage, such as minimum throughput and cell loading characteristics. That means it is the first true apples-to-apples map of wireless service deployment the agency has produced. This map is now publicly available at www.fcc.gov/BroadbandData/MobileMaps and is a demonstration of the work we will be able to do in a broader fashion in the future.

I hope that you find this information helpful. All of the workstreams outlined here are essential for the FCC to comply with the requirements of the Broadband DATA Act and I can assure you that staff across the agency are working as quickly as possible to complete them all. I look forward to working with you and others in Congress as we continue to improve the Nation's broadband deployment data.

Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,

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

Jessica Rosenworcel