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For Immediate Release**FCC SEEKS COMMENT ON FURTHER REFORMS TO RURAL HEALTH CARE PROGRAM*****Program Supports Rural Health Care Providers with Broadband Costs and Other Communications Services***

WASHINGTON, February 18, 2022—The Federal Communications Commission today adopted a Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, which seeks comment on further reforms to the Rural Health Care (RHC) Program rules to promote program efficiency and ensure that rural healthcare providers receive appropriate levels of funding. In recent years there has been an explosion in demand for telehealth services, a trend accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, that has increased the bandwidth needs of rural health care providers. Reliable high speed connectivity is critical for rural health care providers to serve patients in rural areas that often have limited resources, fewer doctors, and higher rates for broadband and telecommunications services than urban areas.

The RHC Program consists of two programs: (1) the Telecommunications (Telecom) Program; and (2) the Healthcare Connect Fund (HCF) Program. In 2019, the Commission adopted the Rates Database, to be used to determine levels of support available in the Telecom Program. However, anomalies and inconsistencies in the levels of support generated by the Rates Database caused the Wireline Competition Bureau to waive the use of the Rates Database for funding year 2021 and funding year 2022.

In today's action, the FCC is seeking comment on several facets of the RHC Program including:

- Options for determining support in the Telecom Program and potential revisions to program forms and the USAC online portal to improve the quality and consistency of data;
- Ways to improve the accuracy of support provided in the Telecom Program, including changes to the Rates Database, as well as alternative rate determination mechanisms;
- A proposal to reform the Commission's funding cap rules to more efficiently and effectively handle the internal cap on multi-year commitments and upfront payments in the HCF Program; and
- A proposal to simplify invoicing by harmonizing the process between the Telecom Program and the HCF Program as part of the Commission's efforts to strengthen protections against waste, fraud, and abuse.

To learn more about the Rural Health Care Program, visit: <https://www.fcc.gov/general/rural-health-care-program>.

Action by the Commission February 18, 2022 by Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (FCC 22-15). Chairwoman Rosenworcel, Commissioners Carr, Starks, and Simington approving. Chairwoman Rosenworcel, Commissioners Carr and Starks issuing separate statements.

WC Docket No. 17-310

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This is an unofficial announcement of Commission action. Release of the full text of a Commission order constitutes official action. See MCI v. FCC, 515 F.2d 385 (D.C. Cir. 1974).