



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF THE
CHAIRWOMAN

March 22, 2022

The Honorable Frank J. Mrvan
U.S. House of Representatives
1607 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Mrvan:

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, high-speed internet service had become vital for school, work, healthcare, and more. The pandemic has only magnified the need for these connections and also has exposed that too many in the United States do not have access to adequate service today. I share your commitment to finding ways to get everyone, everywhere—including all of our veterans—connected to high-speed, reliable broadband service.

As Congress recognized with the 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 support programs, including those in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. Better data will do more than just improve our programs at the FCC, it will help other federal agencies, state and local governments, and Tribal entities develop their own efforts more effectively.

The deficiencies in the data collected by the FCC have long been apparent, but for years the agency lacked the focus and determination to fix these problems. However, the good news is that in December of 2020 Congress provided the agency with appropriations funding to support 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 publish 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. This effort requires many workstreams, including working with a vendor to design a data-flow structure and build the system that will collect, manage, and validate fixed and mobile broadband availability data; conducting a competitive procurement process for a contractor to build the Broadband

Serviceable Location Fabric, a common dataset of all locations in the United States where fixed broadband internet access service can be installed; initiating a complex rulemaking for the mobile challenge process, as well as for verifying mobile broadband availability data and for the receipt of mobile crowdsourced data; acquiring resources to supplement the efforts of staff to provide technical assistance to filers and others as required by the Broadband DATA Act; and engaging directly with industry, other Federal agencies, state, local, and Tribal governments, consumers, and other interested third parties to improve broadband availability data and prepare stakeholders for the new data collection.

In light of this ongoing work, the FCC recently announced that its initial broadband data collection filing window for carriers will open on June 30, 2022 so they can report their deployment data consistent with the new system we are developing. After the filing window closes, the FCC will review the collected data, after which we will render maps that depict the availability data at individual locations throughout the United States and its territories.

I agree with you that we must improve the access that veterans have to broadband, as well as the jobs, schooling, and other resources that are increasingly available online. The FCC is committed to collaborating with other agencies, including the Department of Veterans Affairs, to achieve this objective.

The FCC has worked successfully with the VA in the past on a variety of programs designed to benefit veterans. These include efforts to coordinate with the Veterans' Benefits Administration at the VA to address illegal scam robocalls targeting veterans. In addition, we collaborated closely on the implementation of the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act of 2018, resulting in the designation of 988 as a simple, easy-to-remember, 3-digit dialing code for toll-free access to the national suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline system.

Going forward, I believe that when the FCC completes its initial efforts to improve broadband data collection, veterans across the country will have better access to information about what services are available where they live. In addition, under the law they will have the ability to challenge the maps we develop, if the deployment we report does not match the reality they know on the ground. Moreover, pursuant to the Broadband DATA Act, we will make available to the VA (and any other federal agency) the maps we create as a part of this effort. When combined with location data the VA already collects, we anticipate that it will be able to better assess where additional broadband deployment is needed to connect unserved (or underserved) veterans and work with the FCC and other agencies to ensure that appropriate funds are made available for such deployment.

I look forward to working with you and others in Congress as we continue to improve the FCC's broadband deployment data and ensure that we honor our commitment to our nation's veterans.

Sincerely,

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

Jessica Rosenworcel