

U.S. House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS

B-234 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515

<http://veterans.house.gov>

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April 19, 2021

The Honorable Jessica Rosenworcel
Acting Chairwoman
Federal Communications Commission
45 L Street NE
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairwoman Rosenworcel:

Internet access has become an integral part of our society, necessary for most lines of work and personal activities. This has only become further amplified during the COVID-19 emergency. The pandemic has highlighted, and perhaps exacerbated, the digital divide (the gap between those who have access to technology, especially broadband internet, and those who do not). This has become a particular concern for my work on the Subcommittee, as we have seen the impact of the digital divide on veterans.

During the pandemic, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has significantly expanded the depth and breadth of the virtual services it offers America's veterans—transitioning online when the pandemic made in-person services unsafe or impossible. While VA has successfully expanded tele-technologies to facilitate services such as primary/specialty care appointments and appeals hearings, those services are limited for veterans who do not have regular and reliable access to appropriate hardware and internet resources. Lack of reliable broadband may increase the barrier and prevent veterans from accessing the benefits to which they are entitled.

In a 2019 report, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) acknowledged that “broadband connectivity is crucial to meeting the needs of and providing benefits to veterans, particularly low-income veterans and those residing in rural areas”.¹ Access to job resources and online training, participation in the digital economy, access to social support networks, access to telehealth, and other VA benefits all require reliable broadband connectivity.

On March 23, 2021, the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Technology Modernization held a roundtable discussion on “The Digital Divide: Perspectives from Veteran Service Organizations”. During the roundtable, it became apparent that one of the challenges in bridging the digital divide for veterans is the lack of veteran-specific knowledge on

¹ Federal Communications Commission, *Report on Promoting Broadband Internet Access Service for Veterans* (May 1, 2019) (<https://www.fcc.gov/document/report-promoting-internet-access-service-veterans>).

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the digital divide and its impacts. To continue to assist our nation's veterans in getting the care they need, we must know who lacks access, where the gaps are, and how best we can help.

The FCC's Broadband Data Task Force was created in February 2021 to implement long-overdue improvements to broadband data and mapping tools. As the Task Force continues the Commission's broadband mapping and data collection efforts and works to fulfill Congress's requirements under the Broadband Deployment Accuracy and Technological Availability Act or the Broadband DATA Act², I urge you to include veterans in the FCC's data collection, verification, and reporting. This data would be very beneficial to the Subcommittee as we work with VA to find solutions to bridge the digital divide and improve veterans' access to the benefits they have earned.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,



Frank Mrvan
Chairman
Subcommittee on Technology Modernization

cc: Jean Kiddoo
Chair, Broadband Data Task Force

Hon. Matt Rosendale
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Technology Modernization

² Pub. L. 116-130 (2020).