

**STATEMENT OF
CHAIRMAN AJIT PAI**

Re: *Rural Call Completion*, WC Docket No. 13-39.

In 2019, every American should be able to rely on a telephone system that works. But for those living in rural or remote parts of the country, that's still not always the case. Calls to these areas can get dropped. Or they can result in dead air, false busy signals, or an erroneous message that "the number you have dialed is not in service."

These rural call completion problems can have costly repercussions for friends and relatives trying to connect with loved ones, for small businesses trying to retain customers, and for residents in distress trying to reach public safety officials. This is unacceptable. As one of the congressional sponsors of rural call completion legislation put it, "famil[ies] in rural America should not be disadvantaged because of where they live."¹ Businesses in rural states "should have the same communication access to conduct daily business[] as those in urban areas."² And improving rural call completion is critical "to ensuring the survival of small towns and granting Americans the choice to live and thrive in whatever community is best for them . . . rural, urban, or anywhere in between."³

I couldn't agree more. That's why we continue our efforts to tackle rural call completion problems by taking new steps to implement the Improving Rural Call Quality and Reliability Act of 2017. Specifically, we adopt service quality standards for intermediate providers. (These "middlemen" carriers take calls from the originating carrier and send them toward the terminating carrier, and can be the source of rural call completion problems.) *First*, we require intermediate providers to take steps reasonably calculated to ensure that any calls they handle are in fact completed. When intermediate providers know, or should know, of a call completion problem, they must now act to address it. *Second*, when intermediate providers route calls to rural areas, they must actively monitor the performance of any intermediate provider they use. And based on the results of that monitoring, they must take steps to address any identified performance issues with that provider. *Third*, we require intermediate providers to ensure that any additional intermediate providers they use are registered with the Commission.

In today's *Order*, we also sunset the FCC's call data recording and retention rules for originating carriers, known as "covered providers," one year after the new service quality standards become effective. Sunsetting these outdated rules will allow covered providers to focus on complying with the monitoring and other requirements we adopted last year rather than continuing to collect and retain data that has proven to be of little use in resolving rural call completion problems.

Together, these changes should help achieve Congress' goal of ensuring the integrity of the telephone system for "*all* customers in the United States."⁴

For their outstanding work on behalf of rural consumers, I'd like to thank the following Commission staff: Pamela Arluk, Allison Baker, Alex Espinosa, Justin Faulb, Heather Hendrickson, Kris Monteith, Zachary Ross, and D'wana Terry of the Wireline Competition Bureau; Rizwan Chowdhry, Margaret Dailey, Robert Krinsky, Kalun Lee, and Aamer Zain of the Enforcement Bureau; Malena Barzilai, Ashley Boizelle, Tom Johnson, Richard Mallen, and Linda Oliver of the Office of General Counsel; and Eric Burger, Joseph Calascione, Giulia McHenry, Chuck Needy, and Eric Ralph of the Office of Economics and Analytics.

¹ 163 CONG. REC. H585 (daily ed. Jan. 23, 2017) (Statement of Rep. David Young), *available at* <https://www.congress.gov/115/crec/2017/01/23/CREC-2017-01-23.pdf>.

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

⁴ 47 U.S.C. § 262(c)(2) (emphasis added).