



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

January 30, 2020

The Honorable Paul Tonko
U.S. House of Representatives
2463 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Tonko:

Thank you for your letter regarding the Federal Communications Commission's efforts to encourage high-speed, reliable, affordable broadband deployment to rural communities through the proposed Rural Digital Opportunity Fund. Closing the digital divide is my top priority. I have seen for myself what affordable high-speed Internet access can do for a community—for its families, its schools, its hospitals, its farms, its businesses—as well as the impact of its absence.

In January 2017, in the Commission's first vote after I became Chairman, the agency granted New York State's petition for a waiver of the Connect America Phase II auction program rules in order to coordinate funding between the federal Universal Service Fund and the state's New NY Broadband Program to aid the deployment of broadband infrastructure to unserved areas of rural New York. I am pleased that we were able to partner with the State of New York to bring digital opportunity to many rural residents of the Empire State.

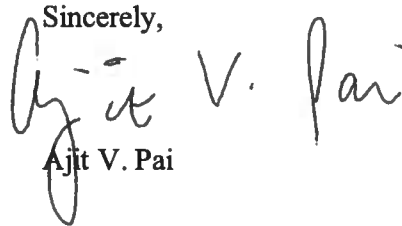
As you know, at the FCC's January 2020 meeting, we will be voting on rules to establish the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund to target support to high-cost areas that lack access to fixed voice and 25/3 Mbps broadband. Phase I will allocate support to wholly unserved census blocks—that is, those areas where our existing data tell us there is no 25/3 Mbps service at all. In parallel, Commission staff are working to implement the Digital Opportunity Data Collection, the Commission's new granular, precise broadband mapping initiative that will enable us to know areas that are partially served. This approach will enable the Commission to move expeditiously to serve the areas we know are unserved in Phase I, and then, in Phase II, target the coverage gaps, including unserved locations in partially served areas (as determined by the Digital Opportunity Data Collection) and areas not won in Phase I.

With respect to your concern about how the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund will impact New York, the draft report and order contained some overly broad language on that issue. I am pleased to inform you that this language will be removed from the item, and that the areas in New York eligible for Phase I of the program will be determined by the same neutral principles applicable to other states. While this of course does not guarantee that any particular area will be eligible for support, it ensures that the Commission's eligibility criteria are applied evenly across the country.

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Thank you for your interest in the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund, and I look forward to continuing to collaborate with you to close the digital divide.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ajit V. Pai". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "A" and a distinct "Pai" at the end.

Ajit V. Pai