



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

March 14, 2020

The Honorable John Kennedy
United States Senate
416 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chris Coons
United States Senate
218 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Kennedy and Ranking Member Coons:

This past week, I testified before your subcommittee concerning the Federal Communications Commission's Fiscal Year 2021 budget request. Chief among the FCC's strategic goals was the urgent need to close the digital divide and provide high-speed broadband service to all Americans, regardless of their location. Since my appearance, we have witnessed in real time the escalating public health issues related to the Coronavirus/COVID-19 outbreak and its potential impact on educational, work and medical facilities, highlighting the need for students and employees to study and work remotely. Suddenly, ubiquitous, nationwide connectivity has become more than just a strategic goal—but rather an essential part of our national preparedness plan for fighting the impact of pandemics and other potential emergencies.

Given the urgency of this situation and the need to ensure that we are equipped for other national emergencies, I have developed a list of currently unfunded telecommunications-related programs for your review as you move towards passing economic stimulus packages to deal with the Coronavirus outbreak. These suggested programs can measurably address medical care gaps and enhance connectivity in various cities and towns potentially affected by the Coronavirus disease.

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act recognizes the importance of telehealth services accessibility during the COVID-19 emergency (section 6010)—we would propose moving ahead more aggressively with telehealth programming. Our proposed Connected Care Pilot Program certainly would do just that—and with an initial investment of \$200 million, we could move toward achieving this goal by rolling out opportunities for telemedicine practices and programmatic development on a national scale. I cannot overemphasize the value of telehealth and telemedicine programs in regions where medical care might be limited and access to a hospital is hours away.

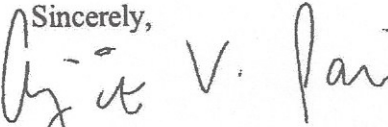
We also propose to implement and fund a July 2019 Government Accountability Office recommendation that the Commission conduct a new pilot program to assess the potential

benefits, costs, and challenges of making off-premises wireless access eligible for E-rate program support. This particular proposal is both timely and necessary. Given schools are shuttering for weeks, our most important national asset—our young students—need online, in-residence access. Employees in many cases also must work from home in order to stem the spread of the disease, making clear the need for broadband access to support essential businesses and our overall economy.

Although our first priority should be moving as expeditiously as possible to combat the immediate Coronavirus outbreak, we would propose the consideration of telecommunications-based programs that address preparation and mitigation for future emergencies. Ubiquitous connectivity and enhanced access to information are essential to offsetting the impacts of future pandemics, natural disasters, and national emergencies. That's why our list includes three large programs recently mandated by Congress: (1) granular broadband mapping that largely ratifies our efforts to obtain more accurate data on broadband coverage, which will improve targeting support through the Universal Service Fund that allow for student, teleworker and telemedicine access; (2) a 5G supply chain fund to support the resiliency of our domestic telecommunications systems; and, (3) spectrum interference tracking to ensure the integrity of broadcasts that often serve as local lifelines during emergencies. We also suggest additional funding for the Commission's information technology systems and providing secure communications for the FCC's small but agile workforce.

I believe that the suggested programs that I am sharing today can have a significant impact on our nation's emergency preparedness and continuity of operations. Much as the 9/11 attacks showed the need to create a seamless, national communications network and improve access for local first responders, the Coronavirus outbreak is demonstrating the vital nature of connectivity issues for all Americans and the need for remote educational access and telework during emergencies as never before.

I have attached our suggestions for your consideration and I look forward to discussing them with you at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Ajit V. Pai

COMMUNICATIONS-RELATED SUGGESTIONS: EMERGENCY STIMULUS BILL

Program	Initiative	Estimated Cost	Stimulus Benefit	Emergency Preparedness
Rip and Replace	Implement Secure & Trusted Telecommunications Networks Act at rate estimated by FCC	\$2B + \$5M Admin	Stimulate U.S. telecom companies to replace Huawei & ZTE equipment & service in their networks	Protect & make resilient essential telecom systems by replacing unsecured equipment
Broadband Mapping	Implement Broadband DATA Act at rate provided in CBO analysis	\$65M	Stimulate telecom-based economies in unserved regions by identifying USF support needs	Support broad range of telecom-based activities: emergency communications, teleworking, telemedicine, remote education
Connected Care Pilot Program	Expand opportunities for telemedicine solutions & programmatic development on a national scale.	\$200M	Stimulates uptake of telemedicine & telehealth in rural areas & for those with chronic conditions; promotes high-value tech-related healthcare jobs & investment	Provides for distance & quarantine locations to be assessed by public health and medical professionals
Off-Campus Connectivity Pilot	Implement GAO recommendation that FCC take steps to assess & publish the potential benefits, costs, & challenges of making off-premises wireless access eligible for E-rate support. FCC agreed with recommendations.***	\$50M	Stimulates new deployment of wireless services & new adoption of broadband for students; educational opportunities to train the next generation	During emergencies, program will ensure connectivity; encourage academic achievement
FCC IT Upgrades	Fully move all FCC systems to the cloud and upgrade IT systems to support telework for all employees.	Up to \$50M	Ensures seamless functioning of critical commercial systems like spectrum licensing for 5G, spectrum auctions, & USF to support broadband deployment for rural America, low-income families, hospitals, & schools	FCC supports core homeland security programming related to spectrum enforcement & emergency preparedness
PIRATE Enforcement	Implement PIRATE Act at rate provided in CBO analysis	\$11M	Stimulate new hiring & RF engineer training & purchase of new American-designed equipment.	Protect local broadcasters essential to communicating with public during emergencies

***(Implementation of GAO recommendation:
<https://www.gao.gov/assets/710/700629.pdf>)