May 15, 2018

The Honorable Ajit Pai
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Pai:

We write to express our strong support and sincere gratitude for the recent Order addressing budget shortfalls in the Universal Service Fund’s (USF) High-Cost program. The Order is an essential, immediate step in the right direction, and we now encourage the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to continue down this path by acting quickly on the notice of proposed rulemaking to provide long-term, predictable support. Such additional steps are necessary to ensure rural Americans have access to high quality voice and broadband services.

The FCC’s recent Order approving an infusion of funds into the USF is greatly welcomed, and will provide needed support for small, rural carriers that rely on the High-Cost USF program. Despite this, persistent limitations on resources can affect the ability of smaller broadband providers to deliver services in our country’s most rural communities. The FCC’s cost model for smaller operators electing model-based USF support is not yet funded at the designed levels, and carriers not receiving model-based support will once again face significant funding cuts when the program’s new fiscal year takes effect on July 1, 2018. These recurring budget shortfalls result in lower speeds, more unserved locations, and higher prices for rural consumers and businesses.

Congress has expressed consistent, bipartisan support for addressing shortfalls in the USF program. In April 2017, 58 Senators called on the FCC to provide adequate resources for broadband delivery services to rural consumers in areas that are the hardest and costliest to serve. In May 2017, 102 Representatives wrote to the FCC, expressing similar concerns about the impacts of insufficient USF resources on rural consumers.

We commend the FCC’s actions thus far to address and modernize USF support. Taking action on the notice of proposed rulemaking and establishing lasting solutions that allow the reformed High-Cost mechanism to work as designed would enable many smaller operators to offer high quality, affordable broadband to consumers across rural America. It is important to consider any modifications needed to meet the program’s objectives of ensuring consistent network build-out and strengthening ongoing service, for locations otherwise unserved, in our nation’s high-cost rural areas.
Thank you for the actions you have undertaken thus far to support the USF and for considering this request. We share your goal of eliminating the digital divide and look forward to working with you to maintain accessible, affordable broadband for rural American consumers and businesses.

Sincerely,

Deb Fischer
United States Senator

Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

John Thune
Chairman, Senate Commerce Committee

Bill Nelson
Ranking Member, Senate Commerce Committee

Roy Blunt
United States Senator

Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

Jerry Moran
United States Senator

Maria Cantwell
United States Senator

Cory Gardner
United States Senator

Gary C. Peters
United States Senator

Roger F. Wicker
United States Senator

Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator
Todd Young  
United States Senator

Catherine Cortez Masto  
United States Senator

Ron Johnson  
United States Senator

Margaret Wood Hassan  
United States Senator

Shelley Moore Capito  
United States Senator

Jon Tester  
United States Senator

James M. Inhofe  
United States Senator

Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator

Charles E. Grassley  
United States Senator

Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator

John Cornyn  
United States Senator

Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator

Pat Roberts  
United States Senator

Ron Wyden  
United States Senator
Michael B. Enzi
United States Senator

John Barrasso, M.D.
United States Senator

John Hoeven
United States Senator

Tina Smith
United States Senator

Claire McCaskill
United States Senator

Joe Manchin III
United States Senator

M. Michael Rounds
United States Senator

Heidi Heitkamp
United States Senator

Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator

Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator