



March 13, 2020

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

Dear Ms. Dortch:

This letter is sent on behalf of NTCA–The Rural Broadband Association to affirm the commitment of NTCA’s members to help sustain critical connectivity in the rural communities in which they live and serve as our nation confronts the coronavirus pandemic.

As you know, NTCA represents nearly 850 small cooperative and independently owned providers of reliable and robust voice and broadband services in the most rural reaches of our nation, serving less than 5% of the U.S. population across approximately 35% of the U.S. landmass. Despite these substantial challenges of distance and density, these small hometown providers have led the charge on investment in advanced networks in rural America, with approximately 3 out of 5 of their customers benefitting today from direct access to cutting-edge fiber connectivity. Moreover, their commitment to community is unparalleled given their local presence; often, “customer service” for NTCA members can mean hearing of customer concerns in the supermarket, at church, or in the school parking lot – and, as providers of last resort in many cases and pillars of their communities, NTCA members are highly accustomed to working with their customers in times of need.

The current pandemic presents challenges and concerns for communities large and small. NTCA members recognize that the coronavirus presents not only deeply serious health risks, but also poses the risk of significant adverse impacts on commerce and education. To the extent that school systems and businesses may need to migrate to distance learning or teleworking, NTCA members are confident that their robust rural networks are as well-positioned as any to help ensure students can continue to participate in online education and that workers can continue to perform their jobs from remote locations. Moreover, to the extent that their customers – their neighbors – encounter financial difficulty due to the economic effects of the coronavirus, NTCA’s members commit to work with those customers during this time in efforts to keep them connected and to mitigate the potential for additional fees in the event that payments are delayed due to such economic effects.

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NTCA appreciates the leadership of the Federal Communications Commission as it seeks to sustain essential voice and broadband connections in the face of the current national emergency. NTCA looks forward to working with you, your colleagues, other policymakers, and other stakeholders in a collaborative effort to help ensure that the mission of universal service in rural America continues to be realized and furthered.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shirley Bloomfield". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Shirley Bloomfield
Chief Executive Officer
NTCA–The Rural Broadband Association