

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 21, 2020

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

Dear Chairman Pai,

As we work to meet the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, Americans are being asked to contact health care professionals virtually more than ever before. This is why we must ensure that every healthcare facility in our country has access to internet connectivity. We urge you to immediately loosen requirements of the Rural Health Care Program (RHCP) to expand eligibility to more healthcare facilities.

As you know, the current COVID-19 pandemic has put an enormous strain on our healthcare system, something we've never experienced before. In response to the outbreak, doctors around the country are turning to telemedicine as a safety precaution to contain the spread of the virus.¹ Virtual visits also enable healthcare facilities to more efficiently handle issues not related to the virus.

The RHCP of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is critical for enabling internet connectivity for rural healthcare facilities that may otherwise not be able to afford it by subsidizing a discount for broadband services.

Following Hurricane Katrina, the FCC loosened restrictions on the RHCP to allow non-rural providers to apply for support under the program.² In 2005, the FCC's rationale for this decision was that "Hurricane Katrina has also severely limited the ability of healthcare providers in the affected areas to respond effectively to both injuries caused by the hurricane and ongoing medical needs of the population."³ Unfortunately, this statement applies almost perfectly to our current pandemic as well.

For these reasons, we ask that you loosen the restrictions on RHCP to expand eligibility to all healthcare facilities nationwide as expeditiously as possible. Thank you in advance for your cooperation, and we look forward to your timely response.

Most gratefully,



Anna G. Eshoo
Member of Congress



Michael F. Doyle
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable Michael O'Rielly, Commissioner
The Honorable Brendan Carr, Commissioner
The Honorable Jessica Rosenworcel, Commissioner
The Honorable Geoffrey Starks, Commissioner

¹ Reed Abelson, “Doctors and Patients Turn to Telemedicine in the Coronavirus Outbreak,” *The New York Times*, March 11, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/11/health/telemedicine-coronavirus.html>.

² Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service, ... Rural Health Care Support Mechanism et al., Order, FCC 05-178 (2005)

³ *Id.* At ¶ 3