



PUBLIC NOTICE

Federal Communications Commission
445 12th St., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

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WIRELINE COMPETITION BUREAU SEEKS COMMENT ON PROMOTING BROADBAND INTERNET ACCESS SERVICE FOR VETERANS

WC Docket No. 18-275

Comment Date: October 12, 2018
Reply Comment Date: October 29, 2018

In this *Public Notice*, as required by the RAY BAUM'S Act of 2018, the Wireline Competition Bureau (Bureau) seeks information and data for the Federal Communications Commission's (Commission) report on promoting broadband Internet access service for veterans.¹ Section 504 of the RAY BAUM'S Act of 2018 directs the Commission to, within one year, "submit to Congress a report on promoting broadband Internet access service for veterans, in particular low-income veterans and veterans residing in rural areas" and "provide the public with notice and an opportunity to comment" in preparing the report.² In the report, the Commission is required to examine veterans' access to broadband and how to promote such access, and provide findings and recommendations for Congress on those issues.³

Broadband is critical to ensuring that veterans, like all Americans, have full and meaningful participation in society. It ensures that veterans in particular can access the resources they need to connect with health care services, find jobs, get information on and apply for military benefits, and generally participate in modern society. The Commission's top priority remains promoting digital opportunities for all Americans, including veterans. For example, the Commission's recent telehealth *Notice of Inquiry* sought comment on "developing a Universal Service Fund pilot program to explore how to promote the use of broadband-enabled telehealth services . . . [among] low-income veterans, with a focus on such services . . . delivered directly to patients outside of brick-and-mortar health care facilities."⁴ The *Notice of Inquiry* identified the significant obstacles faced by low-income veterans and veterans residing in rural areas to obtain healthcare, and noted that veterans living in rural areas are among the largest population of Americans who struggle to receive accessible and affordable healthcare.⁵ While broadband-enabled telehealth services and applications can improve veterans' access to health

¹ Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2018, Pub. L. No. 115-141, Div. P—RAY BAUM'S Act of 2018, §§ 501-512, 132 Stat. 348, 1879 (2018) (RAY BAUM'S Act of 2018).

² RAY BAUM'S Act of 2018, § 504.

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Promoting Telehealth for Low-Income Consumers*, WC Docket No. 18-213, Notice of Inquiry, FCC 18-112, para. 11 (Aug. 2, 2018) (*Telehealth NOI*).

⁵ *See id.* at para. 9.

care, lack of connectivity is a significant barrier to telehealth adoption.⁶ A 2013 study of veterans' use of the Internet concluded that while "veterans may be considered a vulnerable population in the context of the digital divide ... there is a potential to engage [v]eterans with health-related services via the Internet.... to help [v]eterans better manage their health."⁷ This *Public Notice* requests comment on the best ways to assess the state of, and how best to promote, the deployment and adoption of broadband Internet access services to veterans.

First, we seek comment on how to promote broadband deployment and adoption among veterans, with a particular focus on low-income veterans and veterans living in rural areas. How can the Commission and other federal agencies, such as the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), encourage collaboration, partnership, and best practices to promote broadband deployment to and adoption by veterans in these circumstances? Are there particular challenges, unique to low-income veterans or those living in rural areas, in deploying broadband or encouraging adoption? Are there barriers to broadband accessibility specific to low-income veterans and veterans living in rural areas? What initiatives are likely to be the most successful at promoting deployment to veterans, and why? What aspects of different efforts might lead to successful broadband deployment for veterans? Additionally, what initiatives are likely to be most successful in promoting veterans' adoption of broadband, and why? What adjustments, if any, to such initiatives are necessary to reach low-income veterans and veterans living in rural areas to ensure that all veterans can reap the benefits of broadband?

Second, as we promote veterans' broadband deployment and adoption, we find it essential to understand the particular broadband needs of veterans and the benefits that broadband provides veterans. Specifically, we seek comment on veterans' use of and need for broadband for health care, in particular telehealth services, counseling, mental health services, and other health-related services. What are the particular broadband needs of veterans in order to use these health services? What are the benefits that broadband provides for veterans in relation to these specific services? What are the consequences if veterans are not able to obtain these health-related services?

We also seek comment on veterans' broadband needs to find jobs, reenter the civilian workforce, and obtain training for jobs or further education. What online job searching, training, or education programs or services do veterans use? What are the consequences of being unable to reach these opportunities if veterans do not have the ability to obtain these services? Conversely, what are the benefits of these opportunities for veterans that can obtain these job-related services? We also seek comment on the types of government services veterans access with broadband, such as those from the VA and any other government agencies. What government services available online do veterans most commonly use and what are their particular broadband needs for these services? What percentage of veterans take advantage of these services? What can the Commission or other federal government agencies do to promote veterans' use of such services?

Third, we seek comment on the best data and information sources for the report. Using objective, publicly available data, we seek to evaluate and report on broadband deployment and adoption among veterans to formulate recommendations and promote veterans' access to broadband. Are there reliable data and information sources we could use to assess the state of deployment to or adoption by veterans? Are there studies or other sources of information focused on veterans and broadband? In November 2017, for example, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration estimated (based on July 2015 survey data) that "veterans are 1 to 2 percentage points more likely to use the Internet than

⁶ See *id.* at paras. 3, 9, and 24.

⁷ Thomas K. Houston, M.D. *et al.*, *Veteran Internet Use and Engagement with Health Information Online*, 178 Mil Med. 400 (2013).

their non-veteran peers when accounting for a range of demographic characteristics.”⁸ We request that commenters submit information, reports, white papers, statistics and any other data concerning veterans and broadband. In particular, we seek survey data, information on any notable trends and developments, and any quantitative analyses reflecting the current state of broadband deployment for veterans. We also seek information relating current estimates of broadband subscription rates for veterans to better enable the Commission to assess and make recommendations in this report.

As part of this analysis, we propose to use data collected by the Commission. We propose, for example, to measure broadband availability for veterans using FCC Form 477 deployment data (fixed⁹ and mobile¹⁰) and veterans’ subscription rates using American Community Survey data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau.¹¹ FCC Form 477 data contains information on deployment of broadband submitted biannually to the Commission by service providers detailing coverage areas and American Community Survey data provides survey information regarding broadband subscription rates and other demographic factors. Are there other data sources we can use to conduct this evaluation? Industry stakeholders, the public, and other interested parties are encouraged to submit information, sources of data, and analyses.

Lastly, we seek information on ways to promote veterans’ access to broadband by learning about existing or planned initiatives that seek to address this need. What are the existing or planned programs promoting broadband deployment to and adoption by veterans? We seek descriptions of these type of programs. Do any programs focus on low-income veterans and veterans in rural areas? Specifically, we seek information about efforts to promote deployment of broadband networks to veterans. We also seek information on efforts to encourage veterans’ broadband adoption. Finally, we are interested in lessons learned from both successful and unsuccessful efforts to address veterans access to broadband through initiatives or programs.

PROCEDURAL MATTERS

Pursuant to Sections 1.415 and 1.419 of the Commission’s rules, 47 CFR §§ 1.415, 1.419, interested parties may file comments **by October 12, 2018** and reply comments **by October 29, 2018**. All filings should refer to WC Docket No. 18-275. Comments may be filed: (1) using the Commission’s Electronic Comment Filing System (ECFS), or (2) by filing paper copies. Electronic Filing of Documents in Rulemaking Proceedings, 63 FR 24121 (1998).

Comments and reply comments filed in response to this *Public Notice* will be available for public inspection and copying in the Commission’s Reference Center, Room CY-A257, 445 12th Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20554, and via the Commission’s Electronic Comment Filing System (ECFS) by entering the docket number, WC Docket No. 18-275.

Comments may be filed using the ECFS or by filing paper copies. Electronic Filing of Documents in Rulemaking Proceedings, 63 Fed. Reg. 24121 (1998). Comments filed through the ECFS can be sent as an electronic file via the Internet to <http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/ecfs/>. Generally, only one copy of an electronic submission must be filed. If multiple docket or rulemaking numbers appear in the

⁸ National Telecommunications and Information Administration, *Fact Sheet: Veterans’ Computer and Internet Use* (Nov. 8, 2017), <https://www.ntia.doc.gov/other-publication/2017/fact-sheet-veterans-computer-and-internet-use>.

⁹ See FCC, Fixed Broadband Deployment Data from FCC Form 477 (accessed Dec. 2016) (Form 477 database) (Dec. 8, 2017) <https://www.fcc.gov/general/broadband-deployment-data-fcc-form-477>.

¹⁰ See FCC, Mobile Deployment Form 477 Data (accessed Dec. 2016) (Form 477 database) (Oct. 3, 2016) <https://www.fcc.gov/mobile-deployment-form-477-data>.

¹¹ See U.S. Census Bureau, *American Community Survey (ACS): Internet Data Collection*, <http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/library/publications-and-working-papers/internet-data-collection.All.html> (last visited Aug. 21, 2018).

caption of this proceeding, however, commenters must transmit one electronic copy of the comments to each docket or rulemaking number referenced in the caption. In completing the transmittal screen, commenters should include their full name, U.S. Postal Service mailing address, and the applicable docket or rulemaking number. Parties may also submit an electronic comment by Internet e-mail. To get filing instructions for e-mail comments, commenters should send an e-mail to ecfs@fcc.gov, and should include the following words in the body of the message, get form. A sample form and directions will be sent in reply.

Parties who choose to file by paper must file an original and one copy of each filing. If more than one docket or rulemaking number appears in the caption of this proceeding, commenters must submit two additional copies for each additional docket or rulemaking number.

Filings can be sent by hand or messenger delivery, by commercial overnight courier, or by first-class or overnight U.S. Postal Service mail (although we continue to experience delays in receiving U.S. Postal Service mail). All filings must be addressed to the Commission's Secretary, Office of the Secretary, Federal Communications Commission, as follows:

- All hand-delivered paper filings for the Commission's Secretary must be delivered to FCC Headquarters at 445 12th St., S.W., Room TW-A325, Washington, DC 20554. All hand deliveries must be held together with rubber bands or fasteners. Envelopes must be disposed of before entering the building. The filing hours at this location are 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. **PLEASE NOTE:** This is the **ONLY** location where hand-delivered or messenger-delivered paper filings for the Commission's Secretary will be accepted. The Commission's former filing location at 236 Massachusetts Ave., N.E., is permanently closed.

- Commercial overnight mail (other than U.S. Postal Service Express Mail and Priority Mail) must be sent to 9050 Junction Drive, Annapolis Junction, MD 20701.

- U.S. Postal Service first-class mail, Express Mail, and Priority Mail should be addressed to 445 12th Street, S.W., Washington, DC 20554.

- All filings must be addressed to the Commission's Secretary, Office of the Secretary, Federal Communications Commission.

Alternate formats of this *Public Notice* (computer diskette, large print, audio recording, and Braille) are available to persons with disabilities by contacting the Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau at (202) 418-0530 (voice), (202) 418-0432 (TTY), or send an e-mail to fcc504@fcc.gov.

For further information, contact Lauren Garry, Telecommunications Access Policy Division, Wireline Competition Bureau, (202) 418-0942, or Lauren.Garry@fcc.gov.

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