1615 New Hampshire Ave, NW
First Floor
Washington, DC 20009-2520
USA

Telephone 202 628 8410
Fax 202 628 8419
www.ala.org/washoff

Washington Office

ALAAmericanLibraryAssociation

Via Electronic Filing

October 29, 2018

Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary
445 12th Street, SW, SW Portals II, Room TW-A325
Washington, DC 20554

Re: *Wireline Competition Bureau Seeks Comment on Promoting Broadband Internet Access Service for Veterans,* WC Docket No. 18-275.

Dear Ms. Dortch:

The American Library Association (ALA) agrees with the Commission that America's veterans need access to broadband to fully and meaningfully participate in society, get information and resources on

services, find employment and receive military benefits.[1] Roughly 120,000 strong, America's libraries are located in nearly every community in the United States, ready to serve patrons who have served our country —and their families. Bringing together broadband access, trusted information professionals, specialized programs, technology devices and tools, and safe public spaces, America's libraries are an essential piece of the puzzle for connecting our nation's veterans and serving their needs.[2]

The Commission seeks comment on how to encourage adoption among veterans, particularly focusing on low-income veterans and veterans living in rural areas.[3] Libraries throughout the country play an important role in connecting low-income veterans by providing no-fee broadband access and computing resources. Public libraries specialize in providing internet access to *all* people, especially the roughly

---

[1] *Wireline Competition Bureau Seeks Comment on Promoting Broadband Internet Access Service for Veterans*, Public Notice, WC Docket No. 18-275 (September 12, 2018).
[2] See Attachment A: "Libraries Help and Honor Our Veterans," A Policy Brief of the American Library Association. Also available online: http://www.ala.org/news/sites/ala.org.news/files/content/ALA-Veterans-2016Nov10.pdf (last visited Oct 25, 2018).
[3] Ibid

one-third of people who do not have broadband access at home.[4] Virtually every library across the country now provides broadband services at no charge to its patrons, and 98 percent of public libraries provide wireless (Wi-Fi) access as well.[5] According to a 2016 survey by the Pew Research Center, 29 percent of library-using Americans 16 and older said they had gone to libraries to use computers, the internet or a public Wi-Fi network.[6] That amounts to 23 percent of all Americans ages 16 and above.[7] Further, libraries provide access and training to use various technologies, from tablets to video production equipment to 3D printers and augmented reality experiences.

Libraries not only offer passive access to internet content, but library professionals themselves are continuously developing new digital content, e-learning services and other teaching tools that depend on unfettered access to the internet. Library staff also ensure users have the skills necessary to create and distribute their own digital content and applications. This comprehensive approach to digital literacy training —both formal instruction and at point-of-need —bridges gaps in understanding and demonstrates how a home broadband connection can make a positive difference in a veteran's daily life.[8]

While veterans have many of the same information-seeking behaviors as other patrons —taking advantage of educational services, remote medical services, job-training courses, distance learning classes, access to computer and technology training and more[9] —libraries and their broadband connections help veterans access government services and benefits. Libraries may often be the first point of contact for veterans unaware of what their benefits may be. The E-Government Act of 2002 mandated that federal agencies like the Veterans Administration (VA) cut back many traditional programs for the public and, in their place, offer government services in digital form. This model has been replicated in states and localities across the country and allows agencies to cut staffing and office infrastructure costs. It often places the burden on people, however, to find the means of accessing new electronic e-government services. For people in need of government assistance, such a change in service provision by public sector agencies has resulted in the use of local public libraries as de facto e-government service centers.[10]

---

[4] John B. Horrigan & Maeve Duggan, "Home Broadband 2015," PEW RESEARCH CENTER: INTERNET, SCIENCE & TECH (2015), http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/12/21/2015/Home-Broadband-2015/ (last visited Oct 25, 2018).

[5] Larra Clark & Karen Archer Perry, "After access: Libraries and Digital Empowerment," (Dec 2015), http://www.ala.org/advocacy/sites/ala.org.advocacy/files/content/ALA%20DI%20After%20Access_final_12%2017%2015.pdf (last visited Oct 25, 2018).

[6] John B. Horrigan, "Libraries 2016," PEW RESEARCH CENTER: INTERNET, SCIENCE & TECH (2016), http://www.pewinternet.org/2016/09/09/2016/Libraries-2016/ (last visited Oct 25, 2018).

[7] Ibid

[8] See Attachment B: "America's Libraries: Powering Broadband Adoption, Access and Use," A Policy Brief of the American Library Association, http://www.ala.org/news/sites/ala.org.news/files/content/Broadband_11-08-16_0.pdf (last visited Oct 25, 2018)

[9] Horrigan, "Libraries 2016"

[10] Dharma Dailey, Amelia Bryne, Alison Powell, Joe Karaganis and Jaewon Chung et al., Broadband Adoption in Low-Income Communities, SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH COUNCIL (2010) at p. 8. ("Government agencies, school systems, and large employers increasingly privilege web-based access to many basic services, including job and benefits applications. Because many of the constituents for these services have limited Internet access and/or limited Internet proficiency, these measures often shift human and technical support costs onto libraries and other community organizations that do provide access, in-person help, and training.")

Projects like the California State Library's "Veterans Connect @ The Library" are innovative partnerships to help veterans use broadband to connect with government services where veterans sometimes must drive many hours for a single appointment.[11] Funded by a grant from the federal Institute of Museum and Library Services, programs at public libraries throughout California provides veterans with dedicated computers, books, forms, and other information, but also with librarians trained to connect them to a myriad of resources available to them. In another innovative solution addressing challenges rural veterans have in securing services, a partnership between Peoples Rural Telephone Cooperative, the Jackson County (KY) Public Library, NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association, and the VA Hospital in Lexington connects veterans with health care professionals at the VA Medical Center in Lexington through video conferencing made available at the library.[12]

As the Commission seeks effective and sustainable solutions to ensure the nation's veterans can access and use the internet, we also urge the Commission to consider the role of libraries for veterans and their connectivity needs. Libraries need high-capacity broadband to support these modern library and veterans services--particularly in rural communities that lack easy access to a wide range of specialized services (e.g., video conferencing with lawyers, robust distance learning, telemedicine, etc.).

More information on how libraries connect veterans to broadband and encourage meaningful application of it is available in Attachment A, "Libraries Help and Honor Our Veterans," a policy brief of the ALA. For general information about how libraries connect veterans, military families and all people throughout the United States with technology and information, please see Attachment B, "America's Libraries: Powering Broadband Adoption, Access and Use."

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our observations and we look forward to working with the Commission to promote veterans' access to broadband.

Sincerely,

/s/

Marijke Visser

Associate Director, Public Policy and Senior Policy Advocate, American Library Association

---

[11]For more information on the project, see https://calibrariesforveterans.org/ (last visited Oct 25, 2018)
[12] Joshua Ball, "Nation's first Virtual Living Room Telehealth Center brings unique care to Appalachian veterans," Kentucky Today, Feb 3 2018,
http://kentuckytoday.com/stories/nations-first-virtual-living-room-telehealth-center-brings-unique-care-to-appalachian-area,11616

/s/

Ellen Satterwhite

Policy Fellow, ALA and Vice President, Glen Echo Group

/s/

Alan S. Inouye

Senior Director, Public Policy & Government Relations, ALA

Attachments:

Attachment A, "Libraries Help and Honor Our Veterans"
Attachment B, "America's Libraries: Powering Broadband Adoption, Access and Use"