

March 5, 2018

Chairman Ajit Pai
Commissioner Mignon Clyburn
Commissioner Michael O'Reilly
Commissioner Brendan Carr
Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

Reply Comments In the Matter of Promoting Telehealth in Rural America - WC Docket No. 17-310

Dear Chairman Pai and FCC Commissioners

Introduction: We appreciate the opportunity to respond and thank you for your support of the Rural Health Care Program ("RHCP"). ADS supports both native tribal and non-tribal Health Care Providers ("HCP") manage and memorialize the RHCP process by keeping beneficiaries informed, mitigating risks, and providing guidance to assure business continuity.

We realize that the FCC understands the need to bring immediate relief in the event of a proration in FY 2017. However, if rollover funds are insufficient, as it appears they may, a true crisis could be upon us. The concept of proration is devastating to some HCPs, especially those in Alaska. If rollover funds are insufficient, and service providers are unwilling to voluntarily reduce their rates, the outcomes could be unintended failures. Solutions designed to eliminate the need for proration should be identified. If a shortfall of funding is absolutely unavoidable, all applicants should be subject to the same financial burden. Percentages do not represent fairness in terms of support, or lack thereof, especially in Alaska.

Funding Levels:

The funding cap should be increased.

The Telecommunications Program ("TP") should not be capped.

Promoting Efficient Operation of the RHCP to prevent Waste, Fraud and Abuse:

Transparency is essential in helping to control Waste, Fraud and Abuse. Competitive bidding processes work and encouraging competition is essential to lowering the cost of service.

The TP should continue to utilize the difference between urban and rural rate. Rural HCP's cost for telecommunications should be similar to the costs of urban HCPs.

The urban rate could be the average cost of service in the largest 25 Metropolitan Service Areas.

All RHCP data should be available to the public. API technology (JSON) could be utilized to send raw data for all fields of an Application or Form.

The creation of an Eligible Technologies Service List and Eligible Locations List would help provide transparency and eliminate waste fraud and abuse by removing questions concerning the services and functionality performed at locations available for support.

All participants should be held accountable for their actions and should work to eliminate waste, fraud and abuse. Beneficiaries do not have a means to control what the telecommunications companies charge for services. The beneficiaries do not have control over pricing and they do not advocate high rates.

Improving Oversight of the RHCP

Best practices from the SLD E-rate Program should be applied and enforced.

If gifting is a concern, eliminate all forms of gifting, or at minimum utilize the SLD E-rate Program gifting guidelines.

Summary

We ask that program rules be waived and required actions be taken to avoid proration. A remedy for any shortfall in funding should be identified and implemented. In making these determinations, the Commission should consider evidence of hardship, equity, and effective implementation.

The underlying concept of Universal Service implies all Americans have availability to and affordable access of telecommunications. The share of a rural HCP's cost of telecommunications should be in line with urban HCPs. Rural HCPs should not have to pay more for the same service.

Transparency is a must, in all directions on all issues - increased transparency shall provide positive results.

ADS hopes comments provided are helpful and produce positive impact.

With respect, Dan Kettwich on behalf of ADS Advanced Data Services, Inc.
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