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Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

January 8, 2018

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REGIONAL WHIP

Received & Inspected  
JAN 22 2018  
FCC Mailroom

The Honorable Ajit Pai  
Chairman  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12<sup>th</sup> St., S.W.  
Washington, DC 20536

Dear Chairman:

On behalf of my constituents, I commend the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) for its quick response to aid the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI) and its residents following Hurricanes Irma and Maria. I write to urge the FCC to do more as the recovery from these two unprecedented hurricanes faces a long road ahead. A major part of the rebuilding process is our telecommunications sector.

Viya, the largest telecommunications provider in the USVI, is working to restore its network facilities and services to provide residents with vital communications services. There is a priority on restoring wireless networks, because they can be brought online more quickly and meet the pressing need for essential communications services. However, these efforts continue to be hampered by the lack of electricity, failing generators caused by over sustained use and insufficient fuel, lack of access to remote areas to repair and restore networks, and theft of fuel and generators. Under normal circumstances, the Virgin Islands presents a challenging economic and geographic environment in which to operate a telecommunications business. Those challenges are substantially greater presently and for the foreseeable future.

The wireline network was virtually destroyed. Viya must rebuild the landline communications infrastructure almost from scratch. The storms devastated the local economy leaving many residents out of work and businesses unable to reopen. The financial distress that USVI citizens are facing should not deprive them of access to critical communications services. Therefore, I respectfully ask that Viya's requests that the FCC provide financial support to defray customer's telecommunications costs and support the rebuilding of the wireless and wireline networks should be granted as expeditiously as possible. Doing so will provide certainty to Viya about the support available as it implements and accelerates its restoral efforts.

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Viya and other carriers will require federal assistance in the rebuilding process if telecommunications structures are to withstand future hurricanes. Underground hardened networks may be more expensive to build, particularly in insular areas such as the USVI, but resiliency now will prevent continual costly reconstructions in the future.

I am concerned that without a onetime infusion of support for wireless and wireline networks, resilient rebuilding will not be possible. In the current environment, the Territory's telecommunications carriers are unable to bill customers as services remain intermittent. Furthermore, many businesses have not resumed operations, including several in the critical tourism industry, which employs approximately one-third of the USVI. Large hotels have indicated they will take months if not years to resume normal operations and have dismissed their employees in the interim. Without jobs or income, residents are unable to pay their bills, impinging cash flow into the market that would have gone to rebuilding networks.

The American citizens of the USVI need the FCC's continued support. Rebuilding wireless and wired networks to restore essential facilities, including construction of storm-hardened networks where feasible, will be less expensive in the long-run, if USVI facilities are rebuilt in a more resilient manner. For this reason, I ask for your prompt approval of Viya's petitions for customer cost relief and wireless and wireline rebuilding support.

If you have questions regarding this request, I can be reached at (202) 225-1790. Alternatively, a member of your staff can reach Angeline M. Jabbar in my office at (202) 226-7978 or at [Angeline.Jabbar@mail.house.gov](mailto:Angeline.Jabbar@mail.house.gov).

Sincerely,

  
Stacey E. Plaskett  
Member of Congress

Cc: Commissioner Mignon Clyburn  
Commissioner Michael O'Rielly  
Commissioner Brendan Carr  
Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel





FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF  
THE CHAIRMAN

March 14, 2018

The Honorable Stacey Plaskett  
U.S. House of Representatives  
331 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congresswoman Plaskett:

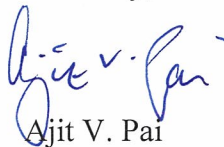
Thank you for your letter about continuing telecommunications network recovery efforts in the U.S. Virgin Islands following Hurricanes Irma and Maria. The hurricanes caused catastrophic damage to communications networks in the U.S. Virgin Islands and in Puerto Rico, and the Commission has made it a top priority to assist with the recovery from last year's devastating hurricanes.

As I saw just last week during my visits to St. Thomas and St. Croix, the people of the U.S. Virgin Islands are still recovering from last year's devastating storms. That means the FCC's work is far from over. That's why I've proposed a plan to my colleagues that would create a \$204 million Connect USVI Fund. It would deliver on that commitment and extend that vision even further. The plan supports both short-term, efficient restoration of service and the long-term improvement and expansion of broadband throughout the U.S. Virgin Islands. With the 2018 hurricane season less than three months away, we need to take bold and decisive action.

I should note this is not the only step the Commission has taken to promote public safety and connectivity in the wake of last year's hurricanes. In addition to providing public information on network outage conditions and sending staff to monitor and aid recovery efforts, the Commission offered Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands carriers nearly \$77 million in advanced universal service funding to help recovery, accelerated the post-incentive auction transition to support broadcasters, granted temporary waivers of Lifeline's recertification rules, expedited approval of experimental licenses for Alphabet's Project Loon to provide Internet access to residents, approved targeted and flexible E-Rate support to help restore connectivity of schools and libraries, and granted more than 200 waivers and requests for Special Temporary Authority to help re-establish communications in hurricane-affected areas.

I look forward to continuing to work with you on this matter. Please let me know how I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,

  
Ajit V. Pai

P.S. Congresswoman, I'm sorry that we missed each other during my recent trip to the USVI. But I was very impressed with the fortitude and resolve of those I met on St. Croix and St. Thomas. Looking forward to working with you as we enter the upcoming hurricane season.