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November 7, 2016

The Honorable Senator Murkowski
709 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Re: INCREASE NEEDED IN RURAL HEALTH CARE UNIVERSAL SERVICE BUDGET

Dear Senator Murkowski,

I am writing to ask for your support ensuring Alaskans continue to have access to affordable broadband tele-health services in rural and Bush communities. The Rural Health Care Universal Service Support budget has remained static for 20 years and must be increased. The current $400 million budget remains at the initial level set in 1997, despite inflation, advances in technology and increased demand for services. The FCC expects that demand may exceed the cap for the first time in funding year 2016. An equivalent budget today, adjusted for inflation, would be about $600 million. Rural Health Care Universal Service Support is essential to enable providers to deliver affordable broadband tele-health services in Alaska's rural and Bush communities. Alaska received more than $82 million in rural health care support for 2015, a substantial increase from 2014.

If rural Alaskans are to continue to receive the affordable broadband tele-health services they need, the FCC must increase the rural health care budget and index it for inflation, as it recently did with E-rate. The FCC has updated the E-rate budget from $2.25 billion in 1997 to $3.94 billion for 2016, and indexed it for inflation, reflecting increases in demand.

Rural health care support enables tele-health services to be provided that dramatically improve access to care, accelerate diagnosis and treatment, avoid unnecessary medivacs, and expand local treatment options.

Cross Road Health Ministries, Inc. has greatly benefited from Rural Health Care (RHC) Program funding since 2004. The RHC Program has enabled us to implement telecommunications that significantly improve healthcare services in the regions of rural Alaska we serve. In particular our patients have benefited from us moving from film-based to digital diagnostic radiology services enabled by secure private connectivity between our clinics and radiology vendor. The same connectivity enables us to securely, reliably and efficiently share information and services between sites, including access to our EMR and integration of our IP phone systems. The connectivity also facilitates increased Internet bandwidth, which has allowed us to more fully utilize cloud-

based services for training and collaboration, for example, and video teleconferencing for meetings.

We ask that you urge the FCC to increase the rural health care universal service support budget, index it for inflation, and provide for any unused funds to be carried forward to future funding years. This will ensure Alaska's rural and bush communities continue to have access to affordable broadband tele-health services, critical for improving access to care.

Thank you for your support.

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