

Congress of the United States

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 17, 2019

294

Honorable Ajit Pai
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20554

Dear Chairman Pai:

We are writing to you today regarding ongoing efforts by the Federal Communications Commission to identify more precisely where fixed and mobile broadband service is available or lacking in the United States. We cannot solve our country's broadband needs until we have a full understanding of the problem. To get there, we need information.

Today, by design, the Commission's National Broadband Map overstates coverage, as it measures broadband availability at the census block level. For example, in the context of fixed broadband, an entire census block will appear as served even if service is offered to only one location within that census block. This can result in denial of broadband network funding or financing in such areas, leaving many locations without essential broadband service simply because they share a census block with a served household. Another significant concern is that the maps ultimately represent unvalidated reports from providers. While providers certify as to the accuracy of information presented, the processes used to verify such information before funding or financing decisions are made can vary – or, in many cases, such processes do not exist at all, meaning that funding or financing decisions flow directly from the maps themselves.

We are writing to ask the FCC to take immediate steps to address such concerns. In the first instance, it is important for the FCC to develop more standardized granular reporting of broadband availability – while also balancing the burdens of reporting especially for smaller operators. This could be accomplished quickly by requiring providers to submit coverage maps, called shapefiles, that provide more detailed information on where service is actually available. Moreover, regardless of the method used to demonstrate broadband availability on a more granular basis, it is important to ensure separately and distinctly the accuracy of that more granular data. As the Mobility Fund experience with wireless mapping indicated, reliance only upon self-reported data will not yield helpful information or good results. We therefore encourage the FCC to establish robust and meaningful challenge processes that will enable better validation of both fixed and mobile data prior to relying upon such data in making funding or financing decisions.

In order to achieve our shared goal to close the digital divide, we must ensure valuable and limited resources are not wasted. Resources should not be going to overbuilding existing networks, as they often have in the past due to inaccurate information, and instead go to truly unserved communities. A validated set of data based upon standardized methods of granular reporting will be essential to ensuring that resources are going to the neediest communities and universal service is available throughout America—this includes urban, suburban, rural, and tribal lands. In the interest of effectively allocating federal resources to unserved communities, we urge the FCC to take immediate action to improve its

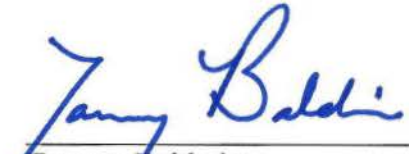
broadband maps, especially as new broadband funding initiatives like the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund are rolled out. We would like to know when the FCC plans to address this issue. Specifically, what steps has the FCC already taken, if any, what steps does the FCC plan to take, and what is the timeline for those steps?

Thank you for your attention to this request. We look forward to working with you as the FCC continues working to ensure all Americans have access to robust and reliable broadband.

Sincerely,



Ron Johnson
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



Jim Sensenbrenner
United States Representative



Ron Kind
United States Representative



Gwen Moore
United States Representative



Sean Duffy
United States Representative



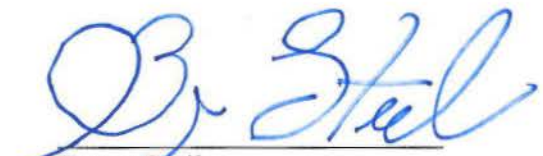
Mark Pocan
United States Representative



Glenn Grothman
United States Representative



Mike Gallagher
United States Representative



Bryan Steil
United States Representative



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

May 23, 2019

The Honorable Ron Johnson
United States Senate
328 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Johnson:

Thank you for your letter regarding broadband mapping. Closing the digital divide is my top priority. I have seen for myself in 45 states, including Wisconsin, and the territories of Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands what affordable high-speed Internet access can do for a community—for its families, its schools, its hospitals, its farms, its businesses—as well as the impact of its absence.

I agree that using updated and accurate broadband deployment data is critical to bridging the digital divide. We need to understand where broadband is available and where it is not to target our efforts and direct funding to areas that are most in needed. That is why the Commission two basic reforms to the collection of broadband data when I came into office. First, we initiated a new data collection for mobile broadband coverage as part of Phase II of the Mobility fund (which included a robust challenge process). Second, we began a top-to-bottom review of the Form 477 process to ensure that broadband data was more accurate, granular, and ultimately useful to the Commission and the public.

In your letter, you ask the Commission seriously consider verifications mechanisms, specifically a challenge process to improve the validation of data submitted to broadband availability databases. I believe a public feedback mechanism could improve the Commission's broadband coverage maps and Form 477 data. Indeed, as you may know, the Commission's Speed Test App is one way that consumers can currently participate in collecting data about broadband deployment, and it has proven to be a useful tool for assessing service availability. I've asked Commission staff to look into other ways to collect and use accurate data from many sources—including consumers themselves—to assemble a more reliable map. We are interested in developing methods for the submission of reliable, consumer-driven data to better inform the Commission's decision making in this area. We would be happy to receive any input you or your staff might have on how to establish and implement such methods.

I appreciate your continued interest in working with the FCC to close the digital divide and look forward to continuing to collaborate on this issue. Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,

Ajit V. Pai



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

May 23, 2019

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin
United States Senate
709 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Baldwin:

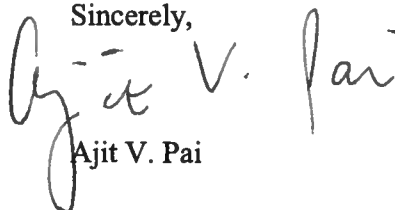
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Ajit V. Pai



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

May 23, 2019

The Honorable Jim Sensenbrenner
U.S. House of Representatives
2449 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Sensenbrenner:

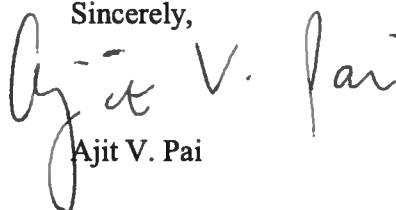
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Ajit V. Pai



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

May 23, 2019

The Honorable Ron Kind
U.S. House of Representatives
1502 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Kind:

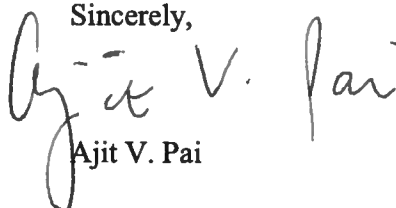
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Ajit V. Pai



OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

May 23, 2019

The Honorable Gwen Moore
U.S. House of Representatives
2252 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congresswoman Moore:

Thank you for your letter regarding broadband mapping. Closing the digital divide is my top priority. I have seen for myself in 45 states, including Wisconsin, and the territories of Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands what affordable high-speed Internet access can do for a community—for its families, its schools, its hospitals, its farms, its businesses—as well as the impact of its absence.

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Ajit V. Pai



OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

May 23, 2019

The Honorable Sean P. Duffy
U.S. House of Representatives
2330 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Duffy:

Thank you for your letter regarding broadband mapping. Closing the digital divide is my top priority. I have seen for myself in 45 states, including Wisconsin, and the territories of Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands what affordable high-speed Internet access can do for a community—for its families, its schools, its hospitals, its farms, its businesses—as well as the impact of its absence.

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OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

May 23, 2019

The Honorable Mark Pocan
U.S. House of Representatives
1421 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Pocan:

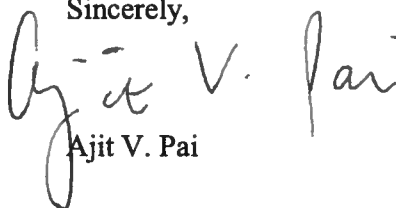
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Ajit V. Pai



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

May 23, 2019

The Honorable Glenn Grothman
U.S. House of Representatives
1217 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Grothman:

Thank you for your letter regarding broadband mapping. Closing the digital divide is my top priority. I have seen for myself in 45 states, including Wisconsin, and the territories of Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands what affordable high-speed Internet access can do for a community—for its families, its schools, its hospitals, its farms, its businesses—as well as the impact of its absence.

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OFFICE OF
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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

May 23, 2019

The Honorable Mike Gallagher
U.S. House of Representatives
1007 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Gallagher:

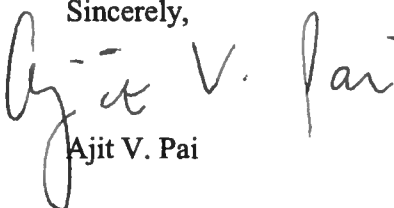
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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

May 23, 2019

The Honorable Bryan Steil
U.S. House of Representatives
1408 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Steil:

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Sincerely,

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Ajit V. Pai