

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 23, 2019

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

311

Dear Chairman Pai:

We write to you today regarding the ongoing efforts of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to identify the availability of fixed and mobile broadband service across the country.

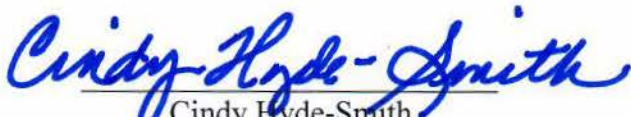
Challenges currently exist to the precise representation of broadband assets on federal broadband maps. Data included on current maps is reported at the census block level. Therefore, if one household or location receives broadband coverage in a census block, the maps indicate that the entire census block is covered. An additional challenge is that broadband maps are populated with information reported by Internet Service Providers. The process for verifying these details is inconsistent, causing the potential for unvalidated information to be included on the maps. The possible inaccuracy of the data also could affect which areas demonstrate the need for more broadband build-out and their eligibility to receive FCC or USDA support.


We believe that the FCC should address these considerations to help ensure federal broadband funds support projects that increase coverage in unserved areas. Data should be more granularly reported, and a robust challenge process is needed so that the FCC can accurately distribute funding for projects that improve coverage where it is needed. We also encourage the FCC to consider smaller Internet Service Providers when determining possible updates to reporting standards so that these operators do not experience burdensome new requirements that would inhibit their immediate participation.


In our home state of Mississippi, much work has been done to expand access to broadband in underserved areas. Telehealth and precision agriculture have helped drive the demand for broadband in areas that have not previously received coverage. Many rural areas of our state, however, still lack broadband availability. We ask for your assistance in continuing to increase access to these important services.

Thank you for your attention to this request. Please let us know if we can be of further assistance.


Sincerely,


Cindy Hyde-Smith
United States Senator


Bennie Thompson
Member of Congress


Steven Palazzo
Member of Congress


Trent Kelly
Member of Congress


Michael Guest
Member of Congress



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

May 28, 2019

The Honorable Cindy Hyde-Smith
United States Senate
702 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Hyde-Smith:

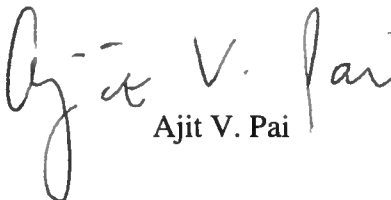
Thank you for your letter regarding broadband mapping. Closing the digital divide is my top priority. I have seen for myself in 45 states, including Mississippi, and the territories of Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands what affordable high-speed Internet access can do for a community—for its families, 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 launched 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 to 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 28, 2019

The Honorable Bennie Thompson
U.S. House of Representatives
2466 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Thompson:

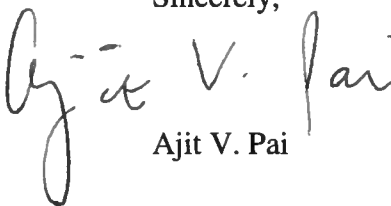
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Ajit V. Pai



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

May 28, 2019

The Honorable Steven M. Palazzo
U.S. House of Representatives
2349 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Palazzo:

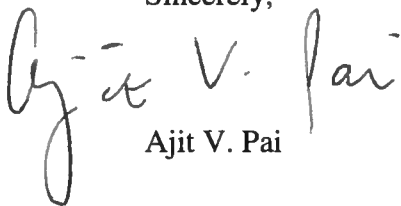
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Ajit V. Pai



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

May 28, 2019

The Honorable Trent Kelly
U.S. House of Representatives
1005 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Kelly:

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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
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May 28, 2019

The Honorable Michael Guest
U.S. House of Representatives
230 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Guest:

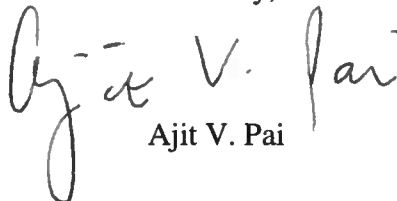
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