July 24, 2019

Chairman Ajit Pai

Federal Communications Commission

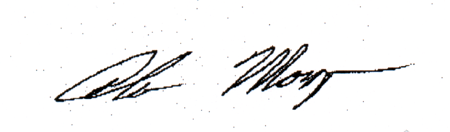
445 12th St. SW

Washington, DC 20554

Chairman Pai:

The National Rural Health Association (NRHA) writes to urge you to postpone adoption of the proposed Report and Order to reform the Federal Communications Commission’s (FCC’s) Rural Health Care Program (RHC) that is currently on the agenda for the FCC’s August 1, 2019 meeting. While we appreciate your efforts to adopt much-needed improvements to the RHC program, the proposed Report and Order does not provide sufficient guidance to RHC applicants, does not address several of the key issues, and will lead to more confusion and funding delays for rural health care applicants.   
  
NRHA is a non-profit membership organization with more than 21,000 members nationwide that provides leadership on rural health issues. Our membership includes nearly every component of rural America’s health care, including rural community hospitals, critical access hospitals, doctors, nurses and patients. We work to improve rural America’s health needs through government advocacy, communications, education and research.  
  
Americans living in rural areas are facing physician shortages and a hospital closure crisis. These difficulties have made obtaining reliable access to high-quality health care a constant challenge. Broadband connectivity and the opportunities in telemedicine and telehealth that is supports, allows rural communities greater access to high-quality and immediate care. NRHA analysis concludes that funding levels remain insufficient to address continued growth in the program. The continued lack of funding and missing program rules concerning allocation of funding, has led to substantial delays for rural health providers seeking to increase their telemedicine capabilities. In many cases, rural providers drop out of the program or curtail their telemedicine services. Rural clinics simply do not have the funding or resources to continue awaiting appropriate guidance and action on this issue.   
  
The proposed Report and Order released on July 11, 2019 does not address the key issues that need to be resolved for the program to operate smoothly. The importance of the RHC program for rural and underserved communities calls for the postponement of a decision on the Report and Order until rural health care providers can work with FCC staff to address these concerns and put the program back on track. NRHA urges the FCC to delay the adoption of the proposed Report and Order to reform the RHC. If you would like additional information, please contact Max Isaacoff at misaacoff@nrharural.org, or 202-639-0550.

Sincerely,



Alan Morgan

Chief Executive Officer

National Rural Health Association