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April 24, 2018

Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Room TW-A325
Washington, D.C. 20554

WC, 02-17-310
WC, 17-310
DOCKET FILE COPY ORIGINAL

RE: Promoting Telehealth and Telemedicine in Rural America, WC Docket No. 17-310

Dear Ms. Dortch,

I write in support of the Emergency Waiver Petition filed by the Schools, Health & Libraries Broadband (SHLB) Coalition on April 3, 2018. This Petition asks the FCC to waive Section 54.675(a) of its Rules and fully fund qualified applications for Rural Health Care (RHC) funding starting with Funding Year 2017, until the Commission completes the open rulemaking in WC Docket No. 17-310.

The RHC program funding cuts of 15 to 25 percent were much larger than anticipated and are effectively retroactive because they were not announced by USAC until more than eight months after the start of the funding year, much later than was reasonable or reasonably expected. As a result, health care providers across the nation that entered into contracts for eligible services effective at the start of FY 2017 (July 1, 2017) face immediate and significant financial hardship.

The Aleutians East Borough, formed in 1987, is a municipal government composed of six rural Alaskan communities: Akutan, Cold Bay, False Pass, King Cove, Nelson Lagoon and Sand Point. The Borough's mission is to provide governmental services to the six communities that include: planning, project management, capital projects, fishery support, and tax collection. Borough boundaries encompass 15,000 square miles of isolated, wild and beautiful land and sea on the Aleutian Chain. The Borough serves a year-round population of 3,141 residents, with large seasonal increases when seafood processing brings in employees. The Borough is very concerned about the health, wellbeing and quality of life for its residents.

The Borough's medical, dental and behavioral health services are provided by Eastern Aleutian Tribes (EATS), who rely on internet capability to provide health services. By cutting the RHC program EATS will have to assess what services they will be able to provide to the residents of the Borough. This is concerning to the Borough, since the quality and type of service EATS will provide will deteriorate, which will negatively impact the health and welfare of the Borough residents.

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I ask that you carefully consider our support of SHLB's emergency petition. While we hope long-term solutions to improve the Rural Health Care Program come from the open rulemaking docket, we must also urge the Commission to act to alleviate the more immediate problems being caused by the recent funding delays and shortages.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Alvin D. Osterback".

Alvin D. Osterback
Mayor

CC:

The Honorable Senator Murkowski
The Honorable Senator Sullivan
The Honorable Congressman Young