

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 11, 2019

449

The Honorable Ajit Pai, Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Pai,

As Congress and the Federal Communications Commission (the Commission) work together to close the digital divide, we encourage the Commission to act swiftly to fix its broadband deployment data collection and reporting process. Precise, granular, and accurate data is essential to determining which parts of the country remain unserved and where to more efficiently target broadband deployment funding. Improved data is essential for Congress and the Commission to identify where adequate broadband service is and is not available, and how to avoid subsidizing overbuilding of existing networks.

On June 12, 2019, the Senate Commerce Committee held a hearing examining policy issues and providing oversight of the Commission. At that hearing, you announced that you would present to the Commission a plan for providing more accurate broadband maps very soon. As you recognized, the Commission's census block-based data collection and reporting can overstate coverage, especially in geographically large census blocks. This can unfairly identify unserved locations and even entire communities as being served, resulting in those places missing out on desperately needed funding support. For this reason, among others, there is a broad bipartisan consensus that the Commission should move away from its census block-based reporting process.

As the Commission continues to work towards a solution and takes up the proposed report and order at the Commission's August meeting, we encourage you to look at the proposals Congress has already introduced, which include reforms that would require wired, fixed wireless and satellite broadband providers to submit data that is more granular and precise to the Commission. For instance, allowing fixed broadband providers to submit "shapefiles" would provide more detailed information about the areas they actually serve than the current census block approach.

Furthermore, we believe that it is critical that any proposal offered by the Commission provide consumers, state, local and tribal government entities the opportunity to challenge erroneous coverage data. Such a process will help the Commission improve the accuracy of the data it receives. These proposals would provide the Commission with an effective framework to begin to replace its flawed census block-based system.


We appreciate the Commission's consideration of our suggestions for ways to improve its broadband data collection and reporting initiative, and look forward to working with you to close the digital divide.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Shelley Moore Capito in blue ink, written over a horizontal line.


Shelley Moore Capito

United States Senator

Handwritten signature of Jerry Moran in blue ink, written over a horizontal line.

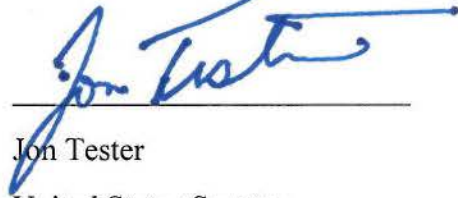
Jerry Moran

United States Senator

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Brian Schatz

United States Senator

Handwritten signature of Jon Tester in blue ink, written over a horizontal line.

Jon Tester

United States Senator



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

August 1, 2019

The Honorable Brian Schatz
United States Senate
722 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Schatz:

Thank you for your letter regarding broadband mapping. Closing the digital divide is my top priority. I have seen for myself in 45 states 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.

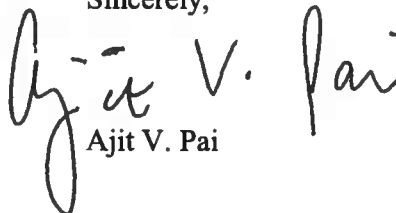
I agree that using updated and accurate broadband deployment data is critical to bridging the digital divide. We need to understand where broadband is available and where it is not to target our efforts and direct funding to areas that are most in needed. That is why the Commission began a top-to-bottom review of the Form 477 process to ensure that broadband data was more accurate, granular, and ultimately useful to the Commission and the public.

After a thorough review of the record and the painstaking work of our career staff, I circulated a Report and Order for consideration at the FCC's August Open Meeting that would result in more granular and more accurate broadband maps through the creation of the Digital Opportunity Data Collection. That means requiring broadband providers to report where they actually offer service below the census block level (using shapefiles, as you suggest), having the Universal Service Administrative Company independently test the validity of that data, and incorporating public feedback to ensure up to date and accurate broadband deployment maps.

These updated maps would be used to focus funding to expand broadband through future initiatives such as the second phase of the proposed Rural Digital Opportunity Fund. The Rural Digital Opportunity Fund will complement and build on the success of the CAF Phase II auction of fixed broadband support, which allocated \$1.488 billion to expand broadband to more than 700,000 unserved rural homes and small businesses over the next 10 years. Once implemented, the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund would provide over \$20 billion over the next decade to connect millions of rural homes and businesses to high-speed broadband, representing the FCC's single biggest step yet to close the digital divide.

I appreciate your 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

August 1, 2019

The Honorable Jerry Moran
United States Senate
521 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Moran:

Thank you for your letter regarding broadband mapping. Closing the digital divide is my top priority. I have seen for myself in 45 states 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.

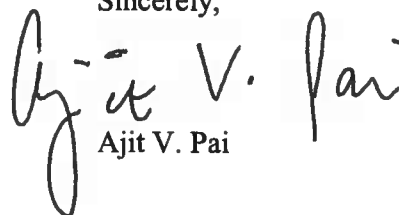
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OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

August 1, 2019

The Honorable Jon Tester
United States Senate
311 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Tester:

Thank you for your letter regarding broadband mapping. Closing the digital divide is my top priority. I have seen for myself in 45 states 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.

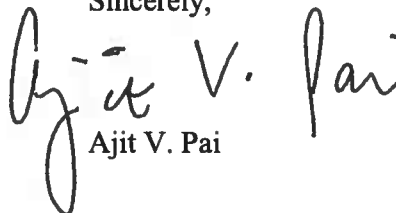
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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

August 1, 2019

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
United States Senate
172 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Capito:

Thank you for your letter regarding broadband mapping. Closing the digital divide is my top priority. I have seen for myself in 45 states 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.

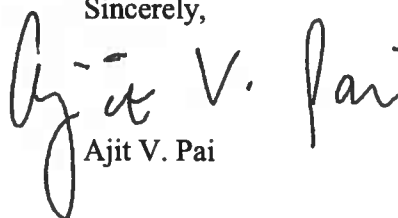
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