

July 8, 2019

The Honorable Ajit Pai  
Chairman  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Washington, D.C. 20554

Dear Chairman Pai:

We are pleased that the Federal Communications Commission is continuing to work on the important issue of accurate broadband maps. It is vital that we are able to more precisely identify where fixed and mobile broadband service is available or lacking the United States.

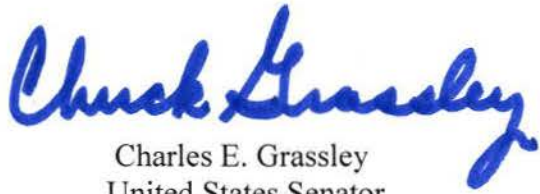
Current broadband availability maps are based largely upon whatever information may be received from providers. There are several problems with the current FCC maps. One example is that the maps are not granular enough. In the context of fixed broadband, an entire census block will appear as served even 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. Another concern is that the maps represent unvalidated reports from providers. While providers certify as to the accuracy of information presented, the process 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.

According to your 2018 Broadband Deployment Report, more than three in four rural Iowans have access to broadband. More broadly, the report indicates that 90.5 percent of all Iowans have access to broadband. As much as we wish that were the case, we can tell you that the FCC data drastically overstates broadband access throughout our state. For example, in Chickasaw County, a rural area in the northeastern part of Iowa, the FCC reports universal broadband access. However, usage data available from technology companies suggests that only 5.9 percent of Chickasaw's residents access the internet at broadband speeds. That discrepancy is too large.

While we appreciate everything that the Commission has done to expand rural broadband connectivity, it is critical for these maps to be improved so public and private partners alike have access to the accurate data needed to bridge the digital divide. Broadband access is a vital link to a range of necessary services and resources for rural America, including business and economic activity, education access, and providing healthcare in a flexible, efficient, and cost-effective way. Therefore, it is critical to ensure inaccurate information will not result in a denial of access to fixed or mobile broadband. A validated set of data based upon standardized methods of granular reporting will be essential to ensure that funding is available throughout rural America.

Thank you for your time and continued attention to this important matter for rural America. We look forward to working with you as the FCC continues to work to ensure all Americans have access to robust and reliable broadband.

Sincerely,

  
Charles E. Grassley  
United States Senator

  
Joni K. Ernst  
United States Senator



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF  
THE CHAIRMAN

August 1, 2019

The Honorable Joni Ernst  
United States Senate  
730 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Ernst:

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 Iowa, 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.

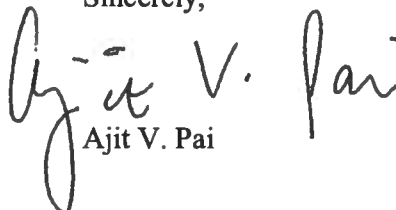
I agree that using updated and accurate broadband deployment data is critical to bridging the digital divide. We need to understand where broadband is available and where it is not to target our efforts and direct funding to areas that are most in needed. That is why the Commission began a top-to-bottom 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 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



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WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF  
THE CHAIRMAN

August 1, 2019

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United States Senate  
135 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

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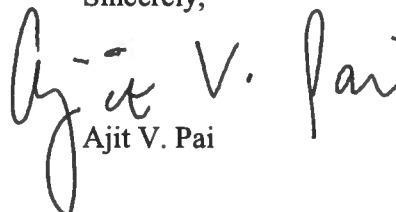
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