

May 21, 2019

297

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

Dear Chairman Pai:

I write to express my concern over the Commission's reported proposal to cap spending for the Universal Service Fund (USF). Limiting resources to this crucial program directly conflicts with the Commission's goal of providing reliable communication services to all Americans.

The mechanisms in place under the USF are vital for bridging the digital divide between rural and urban communities, a goal you often tout. In the 21st century, not having access to high-quality broadband is like not having access to electricity: it is vital for a community's economic development, allowing individuals to work remotely, entrepreneurs to innovate, and businesses to reach distant markets.

Access to high-speed internet is also vital for a community's wellbeing. Thanks to USF funds, more rural libraries offer high-speed broadband to local residents; more rural patients enjoy the benefits of modern telemedicine, saving them long drives to see a specialist; and more rural students have access high-speed internet in their school. According to a study done by the Pew Research Center, a vast majority of U.S. educators give assignments that require internet access, creating an unfair "homework gap" between students who have broadband access and those who do not. Capping USF funds would risk extending that gap, along with many others.

As our lives become more dependent on access to high-quality broadband, we should be expanding our efforts to close the digital divide, not curtailing them. Placing a cap on the USF is tantamount to placing a cap on opportunity for rural communities across America. Though there are undoubtedly opportunities to improve efficiency within USF and better prioritize funds, a spending cap is the wrong approach. I ask that you reconsider this proposal.

Sincerely,



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

August 20, 2019

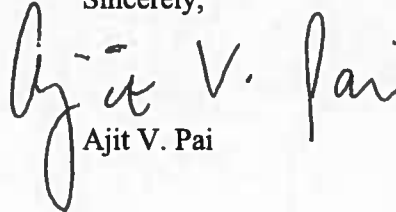
The Honorable Michael Bennet
United States Senate
261 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Bennet:

Thank you for your letter regarding the Federal Communications Commission's *Notice of Proposed Rulemaking* seeking public input on possible reforms to the budgetary structure of the Universal Service Fund. This is an important issue that my colleague, Commissioner O'Rielly, has focused on for some time. As he has noted, each of the USF programs is currently capped or operating under a targeted budget. And as he has pointed out and the *Notice* details, the proposed overall annual budget is \$11.42 billion, which is more than \$3 billion above current USF program disbursements (and is a level that itself would be adjusted for inflation).

The comment period has only recently concluded, and the Commission will review the record compiled in the proceeding carefully. Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Ajit V. Pai". The signature is stylized, with the first name "Ajit" written in a cursive-like script and the last name "Pai" in a more formal, upright script. The middle initial "V." is written in a smaller, simpler font between the first and last names.
Ajit V. Pai