

LGBT Technology Partnership

September 5, 2018

VIA ELECTRONIC FILING

Ms. Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

Re: Accelerating Wireless Broadband Deployment by Removing Barriers to Infrastructure Investment, WT Docket No. 17-79; Accelerating Wireline Broadband Deployment by Removing Barriers to Infrastructure Investment, WC Docket No. 17-84; Streamlining Deployment of Small Cell Infrastructure, WT Docket No. 16-421

Dear Ms. Dortch:

The LGBT Technology Partnership (“LGBT Tech”) respectfully submits these initial comments addressing the Federal Communications Commission’s (“FCC”) Second Report and Order referenced above. LGBT Tech is the premier organization representing the interests of the LGBT community with regards to communications and technology issues. The LGBT Technology Partnership brings together cutting edge tech companies, nonprofit organizations, policy makers, scholars and innovators to improve access, increase inclusion, ensure safety and empower entrepreneurship for LGBT communities around technology. Through education of members and communications providers, as well as direct engagement with policy makers at the local, state and federal level LGBT Tech advocates on behalf of the needs of its LGBT members across the country.

Specific to this proceeding, LGBT Tech has spoken in the past about the importance of launching newer technologies to close the digital divide and 5G has the potential to transform technological access to unserved and underserved communities such as the LGBTQ community by helping to close the digital divide and allow individuals to access basic yet essential services that can make a tremendous impact. Our country, especially minority communities like the LGBTQ community cannot afford to fall behind in the technology race when adequate access to reliable fast technology can impact everything from healthcare, education, economic opportunities or finding a safe community online and could make a huge difference between success and failure in everyday life. 5G has enormous potential to be a powerful tool to eradicate the digital divide as it has the potential to provide faster communications and increase response times for underserved and unserved communities.

As background, LGBT people in the United States are core users of the Internet and broadband technologies and tend to adopt and rely on new technologies at a higher rate than the general population. About 51% of LGBT-identifying adults have used a smartphone or tablet for three years or more, nearly twice as many as compared to those who do not identify as LGBT. Mobile devices play a particularly vital and important role in the lives of LGBT-identifying adults because of their unique need to find resources and places that will be welcoming and supportive to them. Phone services also allow access to supportive community members, friends or loved ones – our research shows that 80% of LGBT respondents participate in a social networking site, such as Facebook or Twitter, compared to just 58% of the general public.

In particular and most relevant to this proceeding, research has also shown that often low-income LGBT individuals are caught on the wrong end of the digital divide. This is especially true for our LGBT homeless, who increasingly rely on wireless technologies as their only means of communications and whose access to the Internet is being affected disproportionately. As poverty rates for nearly all populations increased during the recession, lesbian, gay and bisexual Americans remained more likely to be poor than their similarly situated heterosexual counterparts. Gender, race, education and geography all influence poverty rates among LGBT populations, and children of same-sex couple are particularly vulnerable to poverty. LGBT Tech commends the FCC for its efforts to remove barriers to deployment that will ensure that fewer Americans are caught on the wrong side of the digital divide.

For these reasons, LGBT Tech supports the Federal Communications Commission for its plan to facilitate the deployment of wireless broadband infrastructure by simplifying the regulatory review process. Technology, through smartphones and wireless broadband networks, connects and empowers the LGBTQ community regardless of their geographic location. The internet has been a lifeline for LGBT people in smaller towns and remote communities, in particular. With no one-size-fits-all solution for bringing broadband to unconnected communities across the U.S. currently available, regulators and policymakers need to examine whether structures and frameworks currently in place are impeding the deployment of digital infrastructure to the areas that need it most. Bridging the digital divide requires a multi-pronged approach, and with this Order, it's clear the FCC understands that. LGBT Tech urges the Commission to continue its work removing barriers to deployment that will ensure that these much needed new technologies (such as 5G) reach those that need it the most as quickly as possible.

Respectfully submitted,

Carlos Gutierrez

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LGBT Technology Partnership