

November 14, 2017

**BY ELECTRONIC FILING**

Marlene H. Dortch

Secretary  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 Twelfth Street, S.W.  
Washington, DC 20554

**Re: *Ex Parte* Communication in: AU Docket No. 17-182; WC Docket No. 10-90 (Competitive Bidding Procedures and Certain Program Requirements for the Connect America Fund Phase II Auction)**

Dear Ms. Dortch:

On November 9, 2017, representatives of the Mid-Carolina Electric Cooperative (MCEC) and CarolinaConnect met with FCC Commissioner Mignon Clyburn and Claude Aiken, Commissioner Clyburn’s Wireline Legal Advisor. We discussed issues related to rural broadband deployment in South Carolina and the issues described in the attached 2-page document.

Present on behalf of Mid-Carolina Electric Cooperative and CarolinaConnect were President and CEO of MCEC, B. Robert “Bob” Paulling; Lee Ayers, Vice President, Engineering of MCEC; Glenn Martin, CEO of Carolina Connect; John Frick from the Electric Cooperatives of South Carolina; and Michael Hacker of HDMK.

In accordance with the Commission’s rules, I will file one copy of this letter electronically in each of the dockets listed above.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael Hacker



**The Issue:** In 2017, a glaring digital divide between urban areas and rural South Carolina persists. Huge areas of our state are still unable to get high-speed Internet at any price – it is simply unavailable. This must change or rural South Carolina will be left behind.

**Our Solution:** The solution to our digital divide isn’t new; it is based on the cooperative electrification model that turned the lights on in rural America in the 1930s. As electric cooperatives, we know that electricity is a basic necessity to modern life. We provide the same level of electric service to our members in densely populated areas, as we do to those in sparsely populated areas within our service territories. In the same way, we are aiming to provide equal access to high-speed internet for all our customers, no matter where they live, to ensure that all South Carolinians have the opportunity to succeed and prosper. Closing the digital divide will help level the playing field within education and healthcare; close the gap between the haves and the have-nots, improve the delivery of everyday services; and provide greater economic opportunity to individuals and entire communities.

**How We Work:** Mid-Carolina Electric Cooperative (MCEC) has created an Internet company, called CarolinaConnect Cooperative (CarolinaConnect), to provide MCEC members with high-speed Internet service (either 100mbps/100mbps or 1gbps/1gbps). Our goal is to bring this level of high-speed Internet to 100% of the MCEC membership. CarolinaConnect was also created to serve as a model for other electric cooperatives in South Carolina (and across the country) that strive to provide high-speed Internet service to rural America.

**Request:** We respectfully request funding be made available to help rural cooperatives in South Carolina offer high-speed Internet and all of its benefits to members of all communities across our state, regardless of geography.

**Impact:** We have compiled personal stories and testimonials from CarolinaConnect’s high-speed Internet customers and the life-changing impacts they have experienced.

***Example of a medical benefit:***A veteran undergoing treatment for cancer at a VA Hospital lacked access to the Internet through his telephone company (a Tier 1 telephone company customer). The VA Hospital asked him to go online to access treatment times and to follow up with his cancer doctors. CarolinaConnect, through MCEC, made high speed internet available to meet this critical medical need.

***Example of a business benefit:*** A medical transcriptionist working from home to transcribe medical reports used a cellular connection to download her work each day. However, this woman was spending *$500 each month* on her cellular data plan and wasting 2-3 hours each day to download her work. Once CarolinaConnect connected her to the 100mbps/100mbps service, each day’s download took only 1 minute, as compared to 2-3 hours. In addition, she now saves more than $450 each month and is able to be more productive for her employer and her family.

***Example of an education benefit:*** The father of twin middle school daughters had only one choice for Internet service: a cellular connection provided by his Tier 1 telephone company, because the company – despite a $200 monthly bill – would not offer Internet access where he lived. Each night, he activated the system for 30 minutes to allow his daughters to do their homework, always monitoring their downloads so they would not go over the allotted data limit and incur additional costs. With 100mbps/100mbps service provided by CarolinaConnect, his family had no data limit and endless time to complete homework and explore other learning and entertainment opportunities.

***Example of a rural business benefit:*** A poultry operator in rural Batesburg, SC needs Internet access to control the environmental system for his breeder house. Currently, he pays more than $1,000 per month for wireless connectivity so that he can run his business. With CarolinaConnect, his costs will drop dramatically because we believe that he, too, should have great Internet access for the normal price that anyone else could receive in order to run his business more efficiently.

***Molly Spearman, South Carolina Superintendent of Education***: “Through the use of technology we can deliver high quality instruction across South Carolina and expand student opportunities regardless of zip code, leveling the playing field between our urban and rural schools. I applaud the efforts of Mid-Carolina and South Carolina’s electric cooperatives to bring affordable, quality high-speed internet access to our state’s rural areas and look forward to working together to ensure that every student has the opportunity to be successful.”