
Alaska Telephone Association

Michael Garrett
President

201 E. 56th Avenue, Suite 114
Anchorage, AK 99518
(907) 563-4000
www.alaskatel.org

Christine O'Connor
Executive Director

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Ms. Marlene Dortch
Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Room TW-A325
Washington, D.C. 20554

RE: Alaska Telephone Association Comments on the Petition for Clarification and/or Reconsideration made by NTCA, The Rural Broadband Association, addressing WC Docket No. 13-184

Dear Ms. Dortch:

We offer these comments in support of NTCA–The Rural Broadband Association’s Petition for Clarification and/or Reconsideration in WC Docket No. 13-184 and in opposition to the Wireline Competition Bureau’s use of the Census Bureau’s urban cluster definition to deny rural discounts to Alaskan schools and libraries.

Use of Urban Cluster Designations to Deny Rural Discounts Denies Appropriate Rural Discount Levels to Schools and Libraries in Alaska

The Commission proposes to use Census definitions to determine whether an E-rate applicant qualifies for an additional rural discount. Using Census definitions means applicants in communities which have been designated urban clusters will lose rural discounts¹. ATA strongly objects to the use of the Census Bureau’s urban cluster designation as a disqualifier for rural discounts. The 2010 Census designates multiple Alaskan communities as urban clusters². Regardless of the urban label, these communities are remote and face extremely high costs. They rely on the rural discounts provided by the E-rate program.

For example, Barrow is an urban cluster according to the Census Bureau and therefore would not receive rural discounts. Yet Barrow is extremely remote and high cost. The nearest urban area is Fairbanks, 502 miles away by air. Barrow does not have a road that leads to Fairbanks, or to any other community.³ As has been well documented in the record, the cost of providing service in Barrow is very high. Regardless of these facts, the proposed use of the urban cluster definition would deny rural discounts to Barrow’s Tuzzy Consortium Library. This denies the remote, extremely high-cost nature of the community and would damage Tuzzy’s efforts to meet the needs of its students and citizens.

¹ *Modernizing the E-rate Program for Schools and Libraries*, Report and Order, and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, FCC 14-99 (rel. July 23, 2014) (*Order*), at ¶¶ 222-224.

² Federal Register/Vol. 77/No. 59, 18655.

³ See http://distancecalculator.globefeed.com/us_Distance_Calculator.asp?state=AK

Bethel, Ketchikan, Kotzebue, Nome, and Sitka are each similarly situated to Barrow and are extremely rural, remote and high cost, yet the Bureau proposes to reduce their discounts due to the urban cluster designation.

ATA believes the Commission is misapplying the urban cluster definition. The Census Bureau itself warns against inappropriate application of its rural-urban definitions stating, "If a federal, tribal, state, or local government agency voluntarily uses the urban-rural classification in a nonstatistical program, it is that agency's responsibility to *ensure that the classification is appropriate for such use*. In considering the appropriateness of the classification for use in a nonstatistical program, the Census Bureau urges each government agency to consider *permitting appropriate modifications of the results* of implementing the urban-rural classification specifically for the purposes of its program⁴." (Emphasis added.) In this case the results of implementing the urban-rural classification are not reasonable and penalize truly rural communities. Therefore results achieved through application of the Census Bureau's urban cluster classification are not appropriate for purposes of determining rural discount levels and should be set aside.

ATA urges the Commission to reject the use of an urban cluster designation to trigger elimination of rural discount levels. We strongly urge the Commission to maintain rural discount levels which appropriately recognize the remote, high-cost nature of Alaskan communities.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Christine O'Connor
Executive Director
Alaska Telephone Association

cc: Senator Lisa Murkowski
Senator Mark Begich
Congressman Don Young

⁴ Federal Register/Vol. 76/No. 164, 53030.