

**WHATCOM COUNTY
EXECUTIVE'S OFFICE**
County Courthouse
311 Grand Ave. Suite #108
Bellingham, WA 98225



Jack Louws
County Executive

May 13, 2016

Chairman Tom Wheeler
Commissioner Mignon Clyburn
Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel
Commissioner Ajit Pai
Commissioner Michael O'Rielly
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Re: *Connect America Fund*, WC Docket No. 10-90

Dear Chairman Wheeler and Commissioners Clyburn, Rosenworcel, Pai, and O'Rielly:

I am writing regarding the importance of funding for voice services for the most rural parts of Washington State. Like many others, we have some very rural and remote areas with challenging terrain. Landline voice services remain the primary method of communication for these areas.

The rural and remote residents of Washington experience some of the most extreme weather events, which is made even more challenging by the distance they are from emergency services. For example, in 2014, Washington had the largest forest fire in state history, raging through nearly 400 sq. miles of wilderness and destroying some 300 homes, with President Obama declaring a state of emergency. In the same year, a mudslide in Oso, Washington engulfed a rural neighborhood, covering approximately 1 sq. mile and killing 43 people. In these examples, landline telephone service was critical for emergency services. Restoring landline service is especially important in these rural areas because there is frequently no wireless service -- the telephone is their primary link. First responders rely on maintaining that connection during emergencies and the assurance that communications are restored as quickly as possible if they are disrupted.

Remote area phone service is also particularly important due to reverse 911. This allows first responders to call residents in advance of, and during, natural disasters to give an early warning and communicate updates. This is especially useful during forest fires because it enables emergency responders to quickly warn residents to evacuate if they may be in the path of a fire, which can change direction at a moment's notice.

Landline voice service remains too important to be at risk through a failure to provide adequate funding. Accordingly, we would urge the Commission to support the need for Washington's most rural residents to continue to have access to voice services.

Your support and help is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Jack Louws
County Executive