



December 4, 2009

Via Electronic Filing

Thomas Buckley, Senior Deputy Chief  
Telecommunications Access Policy Division  
Wireline Competition Bureau  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Washington, DC 20054

Re: Request to Extend RHCPP  
WC Docket 02-60

Dear Mr. Buckley:

On behalf of the Health Information Exchange of Montana (“HIEM”), I write to request an extension of the June 2010 funding deadline for the FCC’s Rural Health Care Pilot Program (“RHCPP”).

To date, HIEM has commenced its network build throughout a large and diverse geographic area in northwestern Montana. We have succeeded in laying fiber across the Continental Divide, a stretch of over 185 miles through very mountainous terrain. We are now in the process of connecting seven facilities along this route to our hub in Kalispell.

Because our proposed network design requires a variety of approaches to the various segments, we anticipate the filing of roughly 11 RFPs throughout our network development, a very time consuming process. When combined with Montana’s often short construction season, the window for timely project completion is extremely limited.

Our unfamiliarity with the regular rural health care program processes also contributed to our getting a slow start in accessing funds. In addition, working through matching funds issues in a very difficult economic environment, while successful to date, has also delayed our progress.

Without an extension of the program deadline, HIEM may not be able to accomplish our mutual vision for serving health care facilities in Northwest Montana. Such a result would be a great disservice to the rural/frontier residents in our region.

The Commission's Rural Health Care Pilot Program has provided critical funding to assist us in constructing a backbone network that is now well-positioned to link up health care providers throughout Northwest Montana. We are very excited about this opportunity and fully intend to use all available funding to build an efficient and high-quality health care network in rural Montana.

For all of the above reasons, we request a one year extension of the June 2010 funding commitment deadline.

Should you have any questions or require any additional information, please contact me directly at 406-751-6687 or [kipsmith@krmc.org](mailto:kipsmith@krmc.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kipman Smith". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Kipman" and the last name "Smith" clearly legible.

Kipman Smith  
Executive Director