



## I. Introduction.

The Alaska Rural Coalition<sup>1</sup> (“ARC”) files its Reply Comments in this proceeding pursuant to the *Public Notice* issued by the Federal Communications Commission (“Commission”) on December 10, 2012 seeking comment on the Commission’s updates to its list of potentially unserved census blocks in price cap areas.<sup>2</sup> The Commission is using this list of potentially unserved census blocks on the National Broadband Map to determine carriers’ eligibility for Connect America Phase I incremental support as part of the policies set forth in the Commission’s November 18, 2011 *Transformation Order*.<sup>3</sup>

The ARC membership consists of most of the rate of return incumbent rural local exchange carriers (“RLECs”) in Alaska, who face the unique challenges of meeting the Commission’s updated standards for telephone and broadband services while providing these services to some of the nation’s remotest and highest-cost areas. The ARC recognizes that this

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<sup>1</sup> The ARC is composed of Arctic Slope Telephone Association Cooperative, Inc., Bettles Telephone, Inc., Bristol Bay Telephone Cooperative, Inc., Bush-Tell, Inc., Circle Telephone & Electric, LLC, Cordova Telephone Cooperative, Inc., Copper Valley Telephone Cooperative, Inc., City of Ketchikan, Ketchikan Public Utilities, Matanuska Telephone Association, Inc., OTZ Telephone Cooperative, Inc., Interior Telephone Company, Mukluk Telephone Company, Inc., Alaska Telephone Company, North Country Telephone Inc., Nushagak Electric and Telephone Company, Inc., The Summit Telephone and Telegraph Company, Inc., and Yukon Telephone Company, Inc.

<sup>2</sup> Federal Communications Commission, *Wireline Competition Bureau Updates the List of Potentially Unserved Census Blocks in Price Cap Areas and Extends the Deadline for Comment on the List*, WC Docket No. 10-90, Public Notice, DA-12-2001 (Dec. 10, 2012) (“*Unserved Census Blocks Public Notice*”).

<sup>3</sup> See *Connect America Fund*, WC Docket No. 10-90, *A National Broadband Plan for our Future*, GN Docket No. 09-51, *Establishing Just and Reasonable Rates for Local Exchange Carriers*, WC Docket No. 07-135, *High-Cost Universal Service Support*, WC Docket No. 05-337, *Developing an Unified Intercarrier Compensation Regime*, CC Docket No. 01-92, *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, CC Docket No. 96-45, *Lifeline and Link-Up*, WC Docket No. 03-109, Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, FCC 11-161 (rel. Nov. 18, 2011) (“*Transformation Order*”).

list of potentially unserved census blocks will be key to securing support for the high-cost, currently unserved or underserved areas that need it most. The ARC therefore urges the Commission to take a careful, measured approach when establishing and verifying this list.

## **II. The National Broadband Map Does Not Yet Accurately Depict Coverage.**

The Commission has recognized that the National Broadband Map's data likely overstates coverage in some areas and understates coverage in others.<sup>4</sup> The ARC echoes the concerns expressed by the National Exchange Carrier Association, Inc. ("NECA") in its Comments that the existing map is prone to a number of data inaccuracies that have particular import to the Commission's universal service goals.<sup>5</sup> The Reply Comments filed by Arctic Slope Telephone Association Cooperative ("ASTAC") provide further evidence of the National Broadband Map's inaccuracies.<sup>6</sup> ASTAC notes that, while the csv file on the Commission's website correctly lists ASTAC's service area as unserved, the National Broadband Map

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<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., *Inquiry Concerning the Deployment of Advanced Telecommunications Capability to All Americans in a Reasonable and Timely Fashion, and Possible Steps To Accelerate Such Deployment Pursuant to Section 706 of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, as Amended by the Broadband Data Improvement Act*, GN Docket No. 12-228, Ninth Broadband Progress Notice of Inquiry (Aug. 21, 2012) at para. 31 ("While we believe SBI Data to be the best available regarding deployment, we recognize that these data may tend to overstate deployment, for example, because some customers within a census block may not be able to achieve the reported speeds."); see also *Comments of the National Telecommunications Cooperative Association, The National Exchange Carrier Association, Inc., The Organization for the Promotion and Advancement of Small Telecommunications Companies, and the Western Telecommunications Alliance, in the matter of Connect America Fund*, WC Docket No. 10-90 (Jan. 9, 2013) at 3 ("NECA Comments").

<sup>5</sup> See *NECA Comments* at 3-4.

<sup>6</sup> See *Reply Comments of Arctic Slope Telephone Association Cooperative, Inc. Concerning Potentially Unserved Census Blocks, in the matter of Connect America Fund*, WC Docket No. 10-90 (Jan. 23, 2013) ("ASTAC Reply Comments").

incorrectly lists ASTAC's census blocks and other census blocks in remote rural Alaska as unserved.<sup>7</sup>

The ARC also shares NECA members' concerns that the National Broadband Map does not show the availability of voice services, and does not show the prices for broadband services.<sup>8</sup> The availability of voice services and the price of broadband services are two critical factors that cannot be left out of the Commission's equation when determining whether an area truly has access to universal service at reasonable rates. As the ARC has emphasized before, the Commission must not abandon its commitment to maintain ubiquitous voice services in Alaska and other extremely high-cost areas at comparable prices.<sup>9</sup> The price of services impacts Americans' access to quality voice services and high-speed internet nearly as crucially as does these services' availability to begin with.<sup>10</sup> The Commission must somehow take these factors into account when shaping the data that will determine access to high-cost support.

The ARC urges the Commission to recognize the chorus of voices from carriers in remote areas indicating that the current National Broadband Map data on unserved census blocks simply is not yet accurate.<sup>11</sup> While carriers may disagree on the specifics of coverage in any one area,

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<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> *NECA Comments* at 4.

<sup>9</sup> *See Comments of the Alaska Rural Coalition in the matter of Connect America Fund*, WC Docket No. 10-90, CC Docket No. 09-51, WC Docket No. 07-135, WC Docket No. 05-337, CC Docket No. 01-92, CC Docket No. 96-45, WC Docket No. 03-109, before the FCC (Jan. 18, 2012) ("*ARC USF Comments*") at 19-20.

<sup>10</sup> *NECA Comments* at 4-5.

<sup>11</sup> *See, e.g., Comments of Alaska Communications Systems in the matter of Connect America Fund*, WC Docket No. 10-90 (Jan. 9, 2013) at 6-7 ("*ACS Comments*") ("[identifying] 1991 census blocks that are correctly listed as unserved, but that do not appear in the data set of unserved census blocks available for download from the National Broadband map web site."); *NECA Comments* at 3-6; *Comments of General Communication, Inc. on the CAF Phase 1*

they are united in their assessment that the National Broadband Map data has yet to achieve the accuracy that its crucial place in CAF support requires.<sup>12</sup> Many of the carriers expressing skepticism about the data set’s accuracy are located in remote, rural, Tribal and other high-cost, historically underserved areas. This underlines how important it is that the Commission use robust, accurate data when distributing support designed specifically to support high-cost, underserved areas.

**III. A Thorough Review Process is Necessary to Achieve Accurate and Useful Broadband Map Data.**

The National Broadband Map’s noted inaccuracies mean that this data *must* be “subjected to thorough review, data-driven (re)calibration, and vigorous procedural safeguards *before* being used in any form or format to eliminate, reduce, or otherwise modify USF support.”<sup>13</sup> This data is simply too important, both to the survival of rural carriers and to the future deployment of voice and broadband services to unserved areas, to be determined only through a 30-day comment cycle.<sup>14</sup> Future telecommunications deployment for citizens in rural and remote areas cannot be determined based on data that is widely acknowledged to contain significant factual errors.<sup>15</sup> The Commission must commit to investigating the accuracy of Commenters’ claims

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*Unserved Areas List in the matter of Connect America Fund, WC Docket No. 10-90 (Jan. 9, 2013) at 1 (“GCI Comments”); Advocating on Behalf of the Citizens of the Leech Lake Reservation The Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Tribal Council Formally Submits Notice in the matter of Connect America Fund, WC Docket No. 10-90 (Jan. 9, 2013) (“Leech Lake Band Comments”) at 2.*

<sup>12</sup> *See id.*

<sup>13</sup> *NECA Comments* at 3.

<sup>14</sup> *See id.* at 6.

<sup>15</sup> *See id.* at 5-6;

that certain areas do or do not have access to robust telecommunications at reasonable rates, and should not depend exclusively on carriers as arbiters of this data.<sup>16</sup>

The ARC urges the Commission to proceed with caution as it establishes and verifies the data it will use to award future support. Data errors have the potential to profoundly undermine the Commission's goals of universal service, especially in remote and high-cost places like rural Alaska and other Tribal lands.<sup>17</sup> While the ARC appreciates the Commission's desire to rapidly deploy support for broadband in these areas, the ARC urges the Commission not to sacrifice careful accuracy for administrative speed.

#### **IV. Conclusion.**

The ARC and other rural carriers have made clear that the National Broadband Map data does not accurately display voice and broadband deployment in their service areas. Given the Commission's goal of universal service to these areas at reasonable rates, it is critical that the Commission take the time to establish and verify the factual accuracy of the deployment data it uses to determine and distribute support. If the Commission fails to improve this data, it risks arbitrarily distributing CAF funds without truly assessing which areas need them most.

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<sup>16</sup> Further investigation of the accuracy of carriers' claims to provide broadband service at reasonable rates may be necessary. *See, e.g., GCI Comments* at 1.

<sup>17</sup> *See NECA Comments* at 6; *Leech Lake Band Comments* at 2 ("The evidence of broadband un-served areas within the jurisdictional boundaries of the Leech lake Band of Ojibwe is currently reported patently defective with census blocks in price cap and rate of return territories...").

Respectfully submitted on this 24th day, January, 2013.

DORSEY & WHITNEY LLP  
Attorneys for the Alaska Rural Coalition

By:     /s/ Shannon M. Heim      
Shannon M. Heim  
Elizabeth Gray Nuñez

1031 West 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Suite 600  
Anchorage, AK 99501  
Telephone: (907) 276-4557  
Facsimile: (907) 276-4152

50 S. Sixth Street, Suite 1500  
Minneapolis, MN 55402  
Telephone: (612) 340-8899  
Facsimile: (612) 340-2868  
Email: [heim.shannon@dorsey.com](mailto:heim.shannon@dorsey.com)  
[gray.nunez.elizabeth@dorsey.com](mailto:gray.nunez.elizabeth@dorsey.com)

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