

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 11, 2017

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

Dear Chairman Pai and FCC Commissioners:

In the recent Senate Commerce Committee FCC Oversight hearing, you all recognized that broadband telemedicine is a critical component of addressing the health care needs of Alaskans. Since 1977, the FCC's Rural Health Care program (the Program) has provided critical financial assistance for health facilities to be able to afford telecommunications services. The Program has been extremely beneficial for Alaskans, as it has reduced health care costs and improved the quality of care. Commissioner O'Rielly even noted that Alaska could serve as a model for other states because Program funds are used so efficiently.

The FCC has maintained the Program at its original \$400 million funding level despite rising costs, technological innovation and increased demand for services. Additionally, enlargements of the Program, such as the creation of the Healthcare Connect Fund and the addition of Skilled Nursing Facilities as eligible applicants, have put even more pressure on the Program's already-strained resources.

In Alaska, the Program is essential for allowing providers to deliver affordable, world-class medical care to those living in rural and Bush communities, while saving patients the high costs associated with travel to urban medical centers. Additionally, local providers are now able to consult with specialists hundreds of miles away to develop the most appropriate treatment plan. In a state as vast as Alaska, initiatives like the Rural Health Care program can be life-saving.

Today, we write to urge you to take steps to ensure the interim and long-term viability of the Program in order to meet the increased demand for telemedicine services both in Alaska and across the country. Concurrently, we would hope the FCC would begin a rulemaking process to examine how best to meet the needs of rural health care providers given the changes in both health care and telecommunications technologies over the past two decades, including the digitalization of health care records, the proliferation of cloud-based computing and data storage technologies, and advances in long-distance telecommunications.

We thank you for your continued support for increasing broadband access in Alaska, and appreciate your understanding of the special challenges our carriers face in deploying broadband networks.

We appreciate your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator



Dan Sullivan
United States Senator



Don Young
Congressman for All Alaska