SHLB
SCHOOLS, HEALTH & LIBRARIES BROADBAND COALITION

POLICY ROADMAP 2018

APRIL 2018

THE SCHOOLS, HEALTH & LIBRARIES BROADBAND COALITION

PROMOTING OPEN, AFFORDABLE, HIGH-QUALITY BROADBAND FOR ANCHOR INSTITUTIONS AND THEIR COMMUNITIES

POLICY PRIORITIES

To better serve schools, libraries, health providers, and all other anchors across the country, the SHLB Coalition has identified our top five legislative priorities for the upcoming year. The policy landscape can change overnight in Washington, DC. While we will use these policy priorities as guide posts, we will also remain flexible and diligent in our advocacy efforts.

MORE FUNDING AND ADMINISTRATIVE REFORMS TO SUPPORT RURAL TELEHEALTH NETWORKS

- The $400 M cap on the FCC's Rural Health Care (RHC) program has not changed since 1997.
- Applications for funding have exceeded the cap for the last two years.
- SHLB is seeking an increase in the cap to $800 M per year in part because the number of eligible entities has more than doubled since 1997 and because of growing demand by health care providers.
- SHLB also supports allocating more of the funding to rural markets, where the costs are highest. At the same time, urban connections should continue to be eligible for some support to ensure rural clinics can access urban specialists.
- The operation of the RHC program should be streamlined, especially for consortia applications. Applicants for FY 2017 funding have not yet been awarded.
- Information about the funding for the program should be made available on the USAC website to promote transparency (as with the E-rate program).

FAIRER TREATMENT OF E-RATE APPLICATIONS FOR NETWORK DEPLOYMENT

- Many E-rate Fiber applications were denied with no explanation. Others were denied because they failed to meet a vague cost-effectiveness analysis even though the applicants went through a fair competitive bidding process.
- Commercial providers of fiber should be allowed to deploy additional fiber strands beyond those used by the school or library, whether lit fiber, dark fiber or self-construction. The incremental costs of these additional fiber strands should not be paid for by the E-rate program.
- Schools and libraries with excess capacity should be permitted to share capacity with the surrounding community, such as through the use of white spaces or other wireless services.

FEDERAL FUNDING FOR RURAL BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE

- The National Broadband Plan called for Anchor Institutions to have gigabit speeds by 2020, but a high percentage of Anchors still do not have adequate broadband.
- Deploying fiber to anchor institutions promotes economic growth, helps to solve the Digital Divide, and will be a long-lasting investment in America's future.
- A cost study performed by CTC Engineering estimates the cost of connecting all Anchors to fiber at between $13 B and $19 B, much less than the $40 B estimated cost of bringing fiber to every home.
- Fixed wireless services have advanced over the last few years and can often provide gigabit level speeds to anchors at even lower cost.

GREATER COMPETITION FOR LICENSED AND UNLICENSED TECHNOLOGIES

- The FCC should make available a minimum of 3 channels for unlicensed TV White Spaces spectrum in each market.
- Licensed services in the 3.5 GHz band should be available to small carriers as well large ones.
- Licenses for future 5G providers should be issued through an open competitive process and ensure that the needs of all Americans, especially those of anchor institutions in rural areas are met.

A SINGLE APPLICATION FCC PILOT PROGRAM FOR E-RATE, RURAL HEALTH CARE, OR OTHER USF PROGRAMS

- The FCC has said that integrating the E-rate and Rural Health Care (RHC) programs would help to lower costs and would be more efficient, but currently applicants must submit separate (and very complex) applications for each program.
- Many unserved communities could be attractive to serve if applicants could file a single application to obtain E-rate and RHC funding, and perhaps other USF funds.
- SHLB supports creating a pilot program on a trial basis that would allow applicants to submit one application to obtain USF funding from multiple programs.

A CONSISTENT METHOD FOR MAPPING BROADBAND FOR ANCHOR INSTITUTIONS

- NTIA has been awarded an additional $7.5 M to coordinate the Federal Government's broadband mapping activities.
- Prior efforts to map the broadband services for anchor institutions have led to inconsistent results because the information was not collected in a uniform manner, resulting in substantial variation from state to state.
- The FCC does not attempt to map information about the broadband for anchor institutions.
- SHLB supports the development of a consistent methodology to collect and display information about the availability and use of broadband services by anchor institutions. Collecting such information in a consistent manner would aid research and would allow anchor institutions to upgrade their broadband capacity and better serve their communities.

ABOUT SHLB

The SHLB Coalition is a non-profit, 501(c)(3) advocacy organization that supports open, affordable, high-capacity broadband connections for anchor institutions and their surrounding communities. The SHLB Coalition is based in Washington, DC and has a diverse membership of commercial and non-commercial organizations that support our Mission from across the United States. We receive financial support from membership dues, from our conferences and events, and from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.