



December 8, 2015

SHLB Coalition Announces Filing of Petition for Rulemaking to Improve the FCC's Healthcare Connect Fund

The Schools, Health & Libraries Broadband Coalition (SHLB Coalition) is pleased to announce that it has joined with six telehealth networks across the country to file a Petition for Rulemaking with the Federal Communications Commission to modernize the Rural Health Care program and increase the availability of affordable, modern, quality broadband capable of meeting the needs of health care in the 21st Century. The SHLB Coalition was joined on the filing by regional and statewide telehealth networks in California, Colorado, Montana, New England, New Mexico and Utah.

"We know that the FCC has a deep concern for improving the availability of telemedicine networks, especially in rural areas," said John Windhausen, Executive Director of the SHLB Coalition. "This Petition provides the Commission with a roadmap for how to modernize the program and fully implement the intentions of Congress when it enacted the rural health program as part of the Telecommunications Act of 1996."

The Petition outlines changes to incentivize greater investment in high-capacity health broadband networks, including recommendations to promote consortia applications, reduce the applicant match, facilitate public-private partnerships, and adjust the definition of "rural." The Petition also calls for a number of changes to the administration of the program, including adjusting the categories of eligible entities and improving USAC's processing of applications.

Brian Thibeau, President of New England Telehealth Consortium (NETC) said, "NETC, a healthcare consortium with 319 currently connected Health Care Providers in New England, is pleased to have joined in this effort to improve the Healthcare Connect Fund so that Health Care Providers throughout the United States can obtain better broadband connectivity."

The Petition asks the FCC to open a new proceeding to adopt these proposed changes as quickly as possible. The Petition is available at the link below:

<http://apps.fcc.gov/ecfs/comment/view?id=60001324308>.

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For further information, please contact the Executive Director, John Windhausen at jwindhausen@shlb.org or by phone at (202) 256-9616. More information about the SHLB Coalition is available at www.shlb.org.

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