

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 19, 2019

The Honorable Ajit V. Pai
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Pai:

We write to request that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) discard any plans for setting an overall cap for the Universal Service Fund (USF) programs. Such a proposal would harm broadband deployment, rural health care opportunities, classroom learning, and life-long learning through public libraries by forcing them to compete in order to receive necessary funds. The USF programs have been key to moving the country toward the goal of universal connectivity throughout America and placing an overall cap on the USF programs would threaten this necessary progress.

The four programs that comprise the USF have enjoyed bipartisan support for decades, and reflect the underlying goals of communication policy in our country. The E-rate program specifically ensures that all students from urban and rural neighborhoods can connect to the internet and be afforded all of the knowledge and opportunity that connectivity provides. In today's economy, broadband access is a necessity, not a luxury, and the Lifeline program embraces this principle by providing essential services to lower-income Americans. Additionally, the Rural Health Care program enables skilled nursing facilities and health professionals to have access to vital communication services that assist them in providing health care in rural communities. Communication and broadband access is also important for every person, which is why it is crucial that the Connect America Fund accelerate broadband infrastructure in needed areas, particularly rural communities.

Each program that is a part of USF plays an indispensable role in achieving the ultimate goal of USF, access to communication services for every American. The proposal to place a universal cap on these programs is a direct assault on the FCC's mission of bridging the digital divide. The proposal to combine the sub-caps for the E-Rate and Rural Health Care funds is particularly troubling. None of the USF programs should be pitted against each other and forced to vie for a piece of the pie. Moreover, the FCC's request for comment on "prioritizing the funding among the four universal service programs" violates Congress's legislative intent in enacting the USF.

We believe that all four of these programs should be able to continue to operate and thrive independently without the constraint of a universal cap. Program recipients should also be able to rely on consistent funding for their program and without living in fear that their funding will be slashed in order to provide for the other equally deserving programs.

We strongly urge the Commission to abide by its statutory commitment to students, health care providers, librarians, and those in rural communities.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



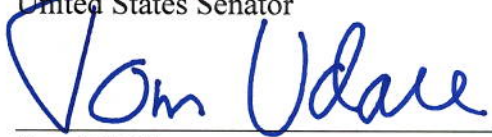
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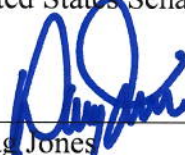
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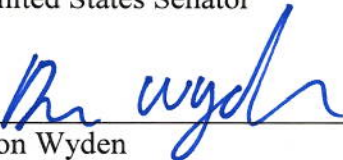
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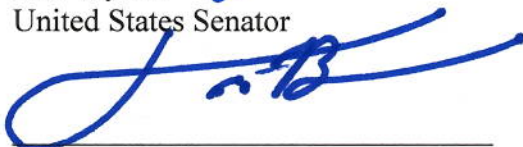
Richard J. Durbin
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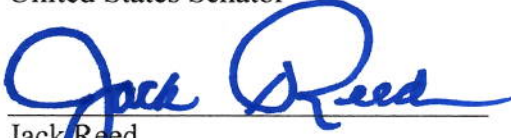
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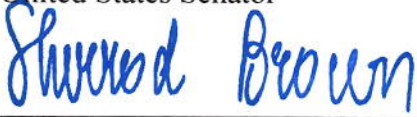



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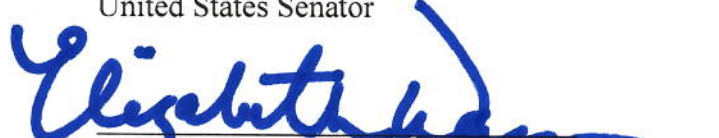

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Kamala D. Harris
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Jack Reed
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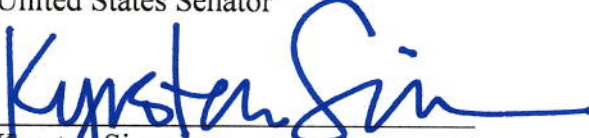

Sherrod Brown
United States Senator

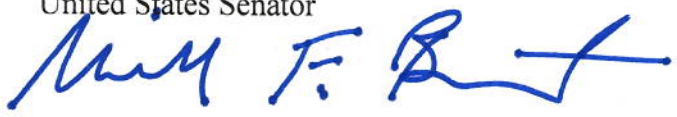

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Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator


Jacky Rosen
United States Senator


Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator


Martin Heinrich
United States Senator

CC: The Honorable Michael O’Rielly, Commissioner,
The Honorable Brendan Carr, Commissioner
The Honorable Jessica Rosenworcel, Commissioner
The Honorable Geoffrey Starks, Commissioner