

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 11, 2017

The Honorable Ajit Pai, Michael O’Rielly, and Mignon Clyburn
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Pai, Commissioner O’Rielly, and Commissioner Clyburn:

We write to encourage the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to continue working to advance broadband deployment in high-cost rural areas to give rural Americans the opportunity to obtain affordable broadband.

Congress has expressed broad support for modernizing the federal Universal Service Fund (USF) toward this goal. On May 6, 2014, 133 Members of Congress – 44 Senators and 89 House Members – signed bipartisan letters calling on the FCC to make tailored modifications to USF support for the delivery of broadband services to consumers in high-cost areas of the United States served by small, rural rate-of-return-regulated local exchange carriers. Similar letters were sent in May 2015 by more than 176 Members of Congress, including 61 Senators and 115 House Members.

The shared concern expressed in those letters was that rural consumers who wished to “cut the cord” on traditional voice “plain old telephone service” (POTS) and opt instead to obtain only fixed broadband services could not do so. As those letters noted, the FCC’s old rules unfortunately tied USF support to a consumer’s purchase of POTS, making it impossible for millions of rural consumers to obtain affordable “standalone broadband” without buying traditional telephone service as well.

We appreciate the steps taken by the FCC last year to address this concern. However, we are still hearing frustration about the prices for and the availability of standalone broadband. Many operators remain unable or unwilling to offer such broadband because their prices would still be unreasonably high even after the reforms. Other operators may offer standalone broadband, but the costs they are forced to recover from rural consumers far exceed what urban consumers would pay for the same service.

All this means that, despite the reforms last year, millions of rural consumers are still not seeing widespread affordable standalone broadband services due to insufficient USF support. Meanwhile, the limited USF budget also reduced the amount of funding available to carriers electing new “model-based” USF support, resulting in tens of thousands of rural consumers receiving slower broadband speeds than intended by the model or not gaining access to broadband at all.

We are concerned that the lack of sufficient resources in the reformed High-Cost mechanism may be undermining the desired effect of the reforms and falling short of the statutory mandate that reasonably comparable services at reasonably comparable rates be available to rural and urban Americans alike. We therefore encourage you to consider any changes to the High-Cost

mechanism that may be necessary to ensure it can achieve the goal of making affordable broadband available to Americans in high-cost rural areas.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to continuing to work with you to ensure rural American consumers and businesses have access to quality, affordable broadband.

Sincerely,



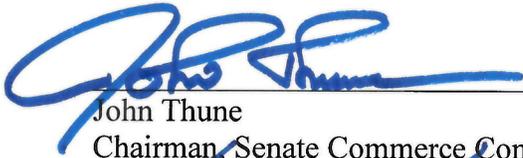
Deb Fischer
United States Senator



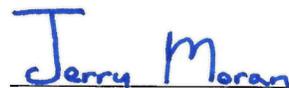
Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



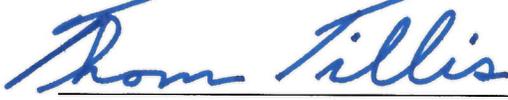
Roy Blunt
United States Senator



John Thune
Chairman, Senate Commerce Committee



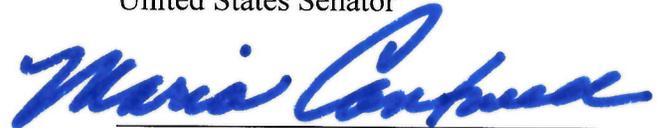
Jerry Moran
United States Senator



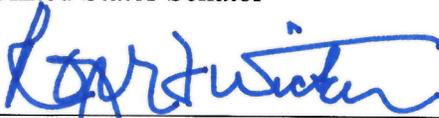
Thom Tillis
United States Senator



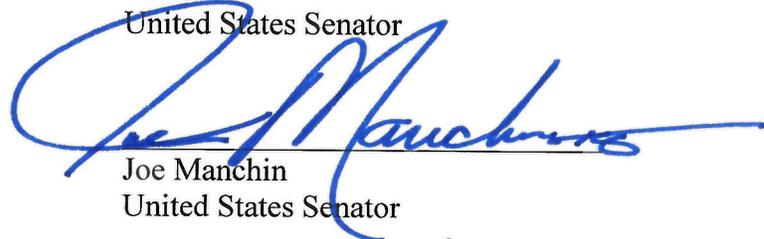
Orrin Hatch
United States Senator



Maria Cantwell
United States Senator



Roger F. Wicker
United States Senator



Joe Manchin
United States Senator



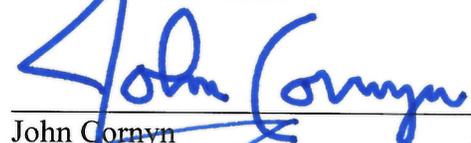
Richard Burr
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



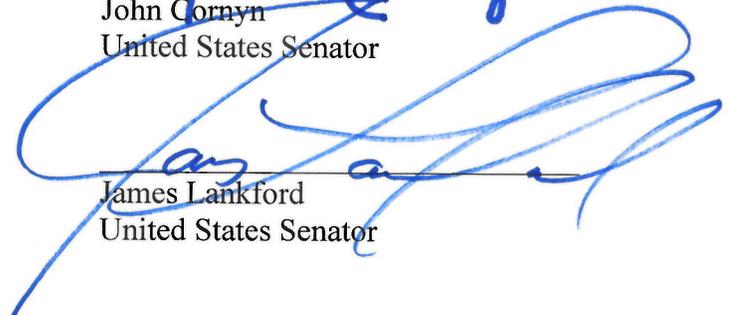
Claire McCaskill
United States Senator



John Cornyn
United States Senator

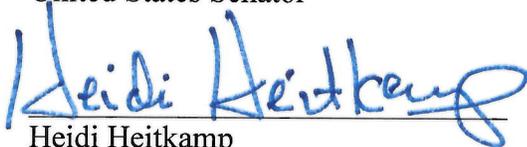


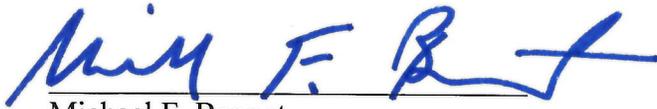
Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



James Lankford
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Shelley Moore Capito
United States Senator

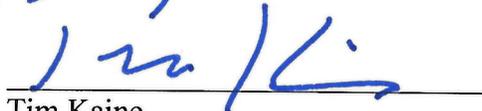

Heidi Heitkamp
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Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator

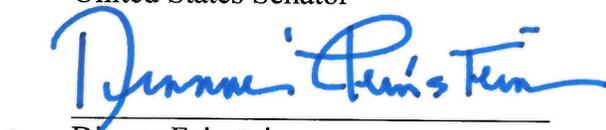

Ron Wyden
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Pat Roberts
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John Barrasso, M.D.
United States Senator

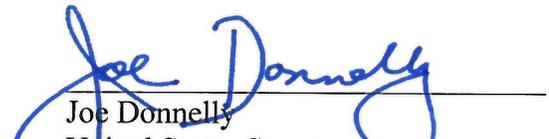

Tim Kaine
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Tom Cotton
United States Senator


Dianne Feinstein
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Cory Gardner
United States Senator

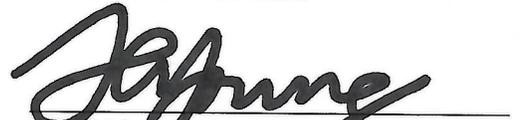

Al Franken
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Joe Donnelly
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Lindsey O. Graham
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Johnny Isakson
United States Senator

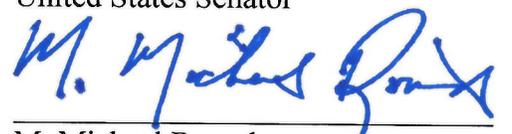

Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator

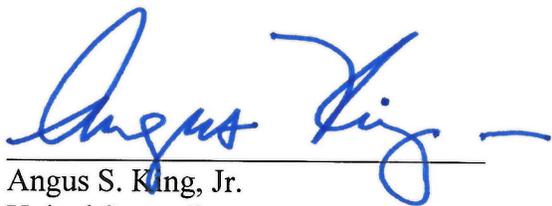

Todd Young
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Richard Durbin
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Jeff Merkley
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Steve Daines
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M. Michael Rounds
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Angus S. King, Jr.
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Rob Portman
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Jon Tester
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Chuck Grassley
United States Senator



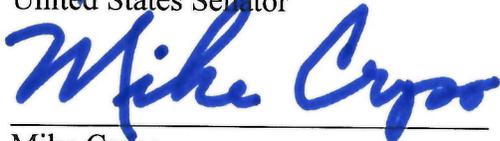
Bill Cassidy
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Gary C. Peters
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



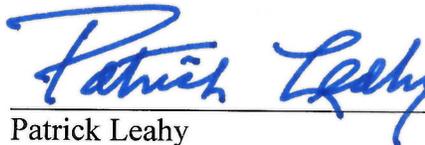
Mike Crapo
United States Senator



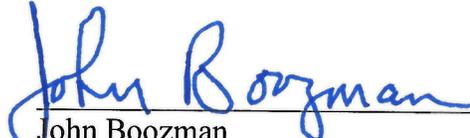
Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator



Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator



Patrick Leahy
United States Senator



John Boozman
United States Senator



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator



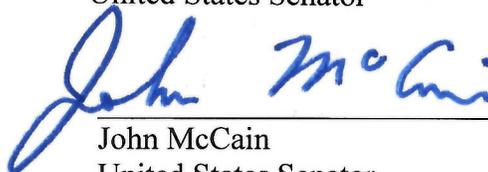
John Hoeven
United States Senator



James M. Inhofe
United States Senator



Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator



John McCain
United States Senator



Tim Scott
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Ben Sasse

Ben Sasse
United States Senator

Michael B. Enzi

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