

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

July 21, 2020

Honorable Ajit Pai
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20554

Dear Commissioner Pai,

We write to request more information about the funding made available to providers through the COVID-19 telehealth program authorized by the CARES Act.

Telehealth is playing an increasingly important role in the delivery of health care services across the country. More and more patients are seeking care from providers over telecommunications technology rather than in a brick and mortar office or clinic. We believe this shift has the potential to improve access to care for marginalized populations, reduce costs, and improve health outcomes by facilitating better monitoring of chronic health conditions.

Telehealth is especially relevant during the public health emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Using telehealth platforms, patients can see providers with minimal risk of spreading or contracting coronavirus. We are pleased that Congress has acted through successive bills to expand flexibilities for federal health care programs to pay for telehealth services during this emergency.

We recognize that the costs of standing up telehealth programs and the insufficient access to broadband internet in many parts of the country are hindering providers and patients from realizing the full potential of these expanded flexibilities, especially during this pandemic. Partially to address these concerns, Congress included a \$200 million appropriation in the CARES Act for the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to support health care providers' provision of telehealth services needed to prevent, prepare for, and respond to coronavirus.

FCC moved quickly to begin distributing the CARES Act funds. On April 2, 2020, FCC announced the program and set the maximum award at \$1 million. The program has proven to be very popular, and on June 25th, FCC announced it would no longer accept applications from providers for funding from the program. Finally, on July 8th, FCC announced the release of the final tranche of approved funding applications from the original \$200 million appropriation.

Providers in our districts are very interested in participating in the program. However, we are concerned that many eligible providers and worthy telehealth projects did not receive funding from the initial appropriation.

As such, we respectfully ask for additional data around the following questions:

1. How much more in funding would the agency require to fulfill all pending applications?
2. What was the average funding amount requested by applicants?
3. What technical assistance has the FCC provided to smaller providers that lack experience in applying for eligibility determinations from the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC) or in dealing with the agency generally?
4. Please provide information about the number of awards and the amount of funding that went to:
 - a. Providers in rural and urban areas;

- b. Each category of provider type as described by Section 254(h)(7)(B) of the Telecommunications Act of 1996;
 - c. Providers who primarily serve high-risk and vulnerable patients; and
 - d. Any additional information that will facilitate Congressional understanding of the program's impact.
5. What is the average number of patients served by each award?
 6. What is the average time FCC takes to process reimbursements for invoiced services and devices by providers?

Thank you very much for your attention to these matters.

Sincerely,



Abigail D. Spanberger
Member of Congress



Dusty Johnson
Member of Congress

Peter Welch

Andy Levin

Brian Fitzpatrick

Alan Lowenthal

Steve King

Brenda L. Lawrence

Steve Cohen

Ami Bera, M.D.

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