

June 20, 2017

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

Dear Chairman Pai:

We write to encourage the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to avoid further delay and to move with all due speed to complete the Connect America Fund Phase II (CAF II) auction that is now more than five years in the making. In a February 2017 Order, the Commission took an important step by adopting a “weighting” structure which appropriately balances broadband speeds, latency, and capacity, ensuring that all technologies have a fair chance to compete and thereby enabling cost-effective use of the finite CAF II budget. As users of networks in rural areas, we have a vested interest in seeing this auction move forward quickly and successfully. Further delay now to rewrite the rules in a manner that may tilt the playing field toward lesser quality networks will not serve the needs of our rural communities and the consumers we serve.

Robust and sustainable broadband connections are becoming more important across multiple industries and institutions, but especially so in rural areas that lack access to certain resources. The CAF II auction will enable rural Americans who currently lack broadband service to gain access to new education and job training opportunities through distance-learning applications and remote diagnostic and monitoring tools that improve healthcare outcomes through telemedicine services. The auction will enable farmers to increase their crop yields through precision agriculture and other innovative tools that depend on broadband connectivity. Once deployed, these rural broadband networks will be critical in generating more economic activity that will help maintain or increase population in these areas. Finally, as perhaps the only network remaining in rural areas over the longer run, it is essential that these networks continue to offer crucial voice services, including public safety 911 access for the communities in which our rural constituencies live and operate.

Networks built with CAF II funds must therefore be scalable and sustainable over the long-term to better meet the growing needs of consumers and businesses in rural America. Consumers have come to expect – and businesses need – a fast, reliable and responsive broadband network that delivers all the applications they require whenever and wherever they want at a consistent, high-level quality of service, unimpeded by high latency, capacity limitations, or environmental impacts such as rain or snow that can create outages. Delaying the CAF II auction now and disrupting the careful balancing act that went into developing performance weights risks harming rural consumers and businesses.

The FCC’s actions in February have moved the CAF II auction much closer to reality. We look forward to the Commission taking final steps to adopt reasonable auction procedures and setting a final auction date as soon as possible, so that consumers and businesses throughout rural America can soon enjoy the benefits of high-quality broadband services that will improve their quality of life and bring economic prosperity to unserved areas of the country.

Sincerely,

Alabama State Association of Cooperatives
America's Small Business Development Centers
Association of Equipment Manufacturers
Center for Family Farm Development, Inc.
Community Food and Justice Coalition
Farm Credit Council
Farm Equipment Manufacturers Association
Fiber Broadband Association
Greene County Democrat
Housing Assistance Council
Independent Community Bankers of America
National Association of Development Organizations
National Association of Towns and Townships
National Farmers Union
National Family Farm Coalition
National Grange
National League of Cities
National Milk Producers Federation
National Rural Electric Cooperative Association
National Rural Health Association
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association
Organizations Concerned About Rural Education
PLBA Housing Development Corporation
Power and Communication Contractors Association
Rebuild America's Schools
Rural Coalition
Rural Community College Alliance
Rural Development Leadership Network
Rural School and Community Trust
Rural Training and Research Center—Federation of Southern Cooperatives
State Agriculture and Rural Leaders
The American Farm Bureau Federation
The Farmworker Association of Florida, Inc.