DENVER RIGGLEMAN
5TH DISTRICT, VIRGINIA

COMMITTEE ON
FINANCIAL SERVICES

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515–4605

1022 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-4711

686 BERKMAR CIRCLE
CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA 22901
(434) 973-9631

308 CRAGHEAD STREET
SUITE 102-D
DANVILLE, VA 24541
(434) 791-2596

April 5, 2019

Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, D.C. 20554

Dear Commissioners,

Thank you for your continued leadership on behalf of American broadband and your commitment to promoting competition, innovation, and investment in broadband services and infrastructure. Your mission to close the digital divide is critical to enhancing economic opportunity, job creation, access to healthcare, and education in rural America.

As you may know, according to your most recent broadband deployment report, 26 percent of my constituents do not have access to broadband. While I believe this figure dramatically overstates broadband availability, I am sure we can all agree that neglecting more than one-quarter of my constituents is unacceptable.

While I appreciate the efforts of this Commission to expand connectivity in rural areas, I believe there are simple, noncontroversial steps that should be taken in order to unleash innovative technologies that will help close the broadband gap and restore economic prosperity for rural communities both inside my district and across the country.

First and foremost, public and private partners alike need access to reliable data to close the rural broadband gap. As I said, I believe the Commission's estimate of connectivity in my district is overstated based on my own experiences and speaking with my constituents. Furthermore, recently released third-party usage data shows that 76 percent of my constituents are unable to access the internet at normal broadband speeds. While I recognize that usage and access are two different issues, the disparity between this data and the Commission's data offers an opportunity to improve the quality, accuracy, and usefulness of the data used for analysis.

That is why I am encouraging the Commission to quickly conclude its broadband mapping review and take the necessary steps to improve its data collection methods. I believe the first step in this process should be only reporting data on areas where consumers are actually being served, not areas that "could" be served. Until the Commission is able to verifiably improve the accuracy of its research, it would be useful to highlight alternative sources such as its own subscription data and data from third-party sources.

PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER

In addition to improving its data collection methods, I believe expanding access to TV white spaces (TVWS) technology will be critical to bridging the rural broadband gap. As you may know, there are currently two separate areas in Virginia that are being served by TV white spaces technology (TVWS). The first is a partnership between Microsoft and Mid-Atlantic Broadband Communities that is helping close the homework gap in South Boston, Virginia. The second, a commercial deployment being operated by Declaration Networks Group and Microsoft, is expected to provide coverage to 65,000 people on the Eastern Shore and parts of Maryland.

As a public official and former business owner, I believe we should reduce the regulatory barriers holding TVWS technology back and incentivize partnerships like these that encourage competition, drive down costs and accelerate broadband coverage. I urge the Commission to help build on recent success by issuing a Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking to adopt appropriate technical rules to maximize the availability of TVWS technology in rural areas and ensure sufficient spectrum is available.

I look forward to working with you to bridge the connectivity divide and ensure rural America has equal access to a modern economy, healthcare system, and education.

Sincerely,

Denver Riggleman
Member of Congress