



December 23, 2020

Chairman Ajit Pai
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th St SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Pai,

We write regarding the directive in the *Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2021*, for the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to equitably and transparently distribute funding to all states for the COVID-19 Telehealth Program. Telehealth is often less expensive, more efficient, and can lead to better outcomes than traditional health care delivery methods, which is why it is regularly used to deliver health care to patients. The pandemic, however, has further elevated telehealth as a critical health care delivery tool. Telehealth eliminates the risk that health care providers may infect, or become infected from, their patients. Virtual care delivery also eliminates the risk to vulnerable patients of becoming infected in waiting rooms or asymptomatic patients infecting others during routine medical visits.

Because telehealth has become so critical during the pandemic, Congress has prioritized its expansion in both COVID-19 relief packages. Unfortunately, when the FCC distributed the \$200 million Congress provided in the first round of the *Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act*, it failed to act in a sufficiently transparent manner and did not ensure the equitable distribution of funding to help Americans across the nation. Although our states needed telehealth to control the spread of the virus as much as any other state, the FCC did not distribute any funds to Alaska, Montana, or Hawaii. As we have learned over the past year, no state is safe from the virus and infection rates can change quickly. Today, with more than 300,000 deaths from COVID-19, and infection rates surging, no corner of this country remains unaffected by COVID-19.

Congress has again directed the FCC to distribute substantial funding—an additional \$250 million—for the COVID-19 Telehealth Program through the *Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2021*. Rather than allow the FCC to merely repeat the process it undertook to distribute funding in the first round, however, Congress has ordered the FCC to seek comment on the metrics that it should use to evaluate applications for funding and to provide prior notice to Congress of the metrics that the FCC plans to use to evaluate applications for these funds. The legislation also directs that funding should be distributed equitably across the nation and to all states. It is clear that Congress expects the FCC to improve transparency around the application processes and equitably distribute funds so that they reach *all* 50 states.

The current COVID-19 crisis demands that the FCC act urgently so that Americans can use telehealth to safely access health care services. However, in light of Congress' directives, and of the prior funding gaps for our states, its actions to distribute COVID-19 Telehealth Program

support must also be equitable and transparent. We look forward to hearing from the FCC when it reports to Congress and working with you to ensure that access to telehealth is available for all patients across the country, including in our states.

Respectfully,



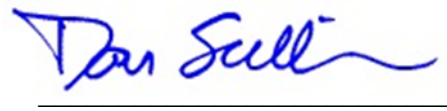
BRIAN SCHATZ
United States Senator



LISA A. MURKOWSKI
United States Senator



JON TESTER
United States Senator



DAN SULLIVAN
United States Senator



MAZIE K. HIRONO
United States Senator



STEVE DAINES
United States Senator

cc: The Honorable Chuck Schumer
The Honorable Mitch McConnell
The Honorable Maria Cantwell
The Honorable Roger Wicker