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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION AND FORESTRY

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6000

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The Honorable Tom Wheeler
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

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Dear Chairman Wheeler:

Passage of the 1996 Telecommunications Act established the important federal policy principle that rural areas of our country must have reasonably equivalent access to the same telecommunications services as more urban areas of America. The proliferation of wireless telecommunications technology and services across our country in recent years has been a critical factor in the implementation of this key policy principle. The availability of reliable mobile telecommunications networks in rural America has been and should remain a driving force for agricultural productivity and economic development in these areas, and for meeting the health and public safety needs of rural residents.

As the Chairwoman and Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, we urge the Federal Communications Commission to be mindful of the needs of those in the agriculture sector and of other Americans living in rural areas as you consider final rules for Phase II of the Mobility Fund (MF II). We are hopeful that this proceeding to reform and revise the Universal Service Fund's support of wireless networks will ensure that rural Americans have the same access to competitive advanced wireless services as their urban counterparts.

Significant gains in agricultural productivity and yields have been made possible through the use of wireless technologies which depend upon the availability of robust wireless coverage over our nation's rural communities and vast croplands. Furthermore, the expansion and use of telehealth and public safety applications that keep America's farming communities healthy and safe also depend on reliable access to wireless networks. The existence of such wireless networks and the coverage they provide in rural areas requires continued, competitively neutral Universal Service support for their construction, upgrading and ongoing operation.

The current and future success of the rural economy is closely tied to access to ubiquitous, advanced mobile infrastructure that can provide high speed data and voice coverage. Since considerable coverage gaps persist in many rural areas, the rules for MF II and the resources made available for this program must meet this challenge.

We ask the Commission to reconcile its rules for MF II with the challenges of realizing quality wireless coverage in rural America, and we hope the FCC will craft a Universal Service support mechanism that will meet rural America's growing need for access to competitive advanced wireless services.

Sincerely,



Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman



Thad Cochran
Ranking Member