

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4804

November 15, 2017

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

Dear Chairman Pai:

As you know, the Federal Communications Commission (Commission) is scheduled to vote on the draft Wireline Broadband Deployment Report and Order tomorrow, November 16th. While I applaud the Commission's commitment to making advanced high-speed networks accessible to all Americans, I am concerned that the current plan may have unintended consequences for rural America and the people I represent.

As I understand it, the draft Wireline Broadband Deployment Report and Order would eliminate a provision that requires companies to give direct notice to their retail customers that they are retiring copper landline service, including de facto retirements due to neglect or lack of maintenance. It would also make it easier for incumbent local exchange carriers (ILECs) to discontinue, reduce, or impair service by eliminating the Functional Test and lowering the bar for what constitutes acceptable service.

I recognize that the retirement of copper wireline for other networks such as fiber is not only inevitable but will actually improve the reliability of coverage in certain areas. However, during periods of technological transition, it is imperative that consumers and exchange carriers have a reasonable and realistic timeline to prepare for these changes which in many cases can be costly and disruptive to their daily lives.

I have been proud to work with the Commission on keeping the promise of universal service and ensuring that all Americans have access to comparable communications services, but I am deeply concerned that this draft order does not reflect that same commitment. For many in rural America, including many places within West Virginia, copper wireline landlines are still the only way they can communicate, and we must ensure that these networks are maintained and serviced until there is a functional alternative in place. When that transition does take place, consumer protections and education are critical to helping these consumers better understand the potential benefits offered by the new technologies available to them.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and I stand ready to work with you to ensure we can provide strong and reliable broadband service to all Americans.

Sincerely,



Joe Manchin III
United States Senator