

January 21, 2021

EX PARTE PRESENTATION

Ms. Marlene H. Dortch
Secretary
Federal Communications Commissions
45 L Street NE
Washington, DC 20554

Re: Emergency Broadband Connectivity Fund Assistance, WC Docket No. 20-445

Dear Ms. Dortch:

On January 19, 2021, INCOMPAS' Chip Pickering, Christopher Shipley, Andrew Mincheff, and the undersigned discussed the above-captioned proceeding with Commissioner Starks and his staff, including William Davenport, Austin Bonner, and Katie Mellinger. INCOMPAS supports the Emergency Broadband Benefit program (EBB) which will be a boon for low-income consumers who need access to broadband during the COVID-19 pandemic for their children's education, their work and potential job opportunities, and medical care, among other needs. INCOMPAS is pleased that Commissioner Starks and his office are leading the effort to ensure that the EBB reaches as many consumers in need as possible and is successful in achieving the bipartisan Congressional objectives for which it was created to ensure that the unfortunate digital divide in our nation is addressed during the pandemic.

INCOMPAS represents competitive broadband companies many of which are small businesses that serve their local communities in which they live. They have invested (and continue to do so) in fiber and fixed wireless service to residential and small business customers—offering them faster speeds, greater bandwidth capability, more affordable pricing, and better customer service. Almost all of INCOMPAS' members participated in the Keep Americans Connected pledge, and many have continued to offer upgrades and free service, and work with their customers on payment plans during the financial challenges of the pandemic. The EBB is a welcome addition to their arsenal in helping during COVID. To ensure that the EBB best meets consumers' needs we offered the following points for consideration:

Competition is Key to Success of the EBB. Enabling competitive alternatives will benefit consumers in the EBB. Because competitive networks typically offer better speeds and connectivity, and low-income households usually are larger and have numerous children and adults, competitors can help meet the needs of these families who require faster upload capability

for video calls and other digital needs. Moreover, the program will benefit from more participation by competitors whose pricing typically is more affordable, allowing the program's funding to meet more needs overall.

Streamlining Approval for non-ETC participation is Critical. Many of the companies that are planning to participate in the EBB are not ETCs and will need to be approved by the FCC to participate. INCOMPAS believes that participation by competitors will help this program succeed, and as such, it will be important that the program rules for designating broadband providers be simple, clear and easy to follow. Any designation process should not be overly burdensome for providers that can demonstrate that they have an ongoing relationship with FCC or USF programs like E-Rate. Providers that regularly participate in Commission proceedings or engage in trade associations that advocate before the FCC and have a demonstrated track record of serving consumers should provide some assurance that streamlining their approval to participate is in the public interest and will help meet EBB goals. Accordingly, streamlining approval will be important so that competition is successful for this program which will benefit consumers and the EBB.

Begin Educating non-ETCs Now for Program Implementation. It is also important that the FCC and USAC take action *now* to educate interested, non-ETC designated companies and others like them on the steps they need to take to implement the program successfully. INCOMPAS discussed how USAC and the FCC could begin the process of such education through webinars about the processes companies will need to implement to participate in the program. Helpful topics would include, for example, eligibility verification, reimbursement and program reporting, and the technical requirements to access the Lifeline National Eligibility Verifier and National Lifeline Accountability Database for verification purposes and reimbursement process through the Lifeline Claims System.

Marketing the Program to Consumers is Important, and Regular Communications with EBB Providers Will Ensure Consumer Expectations are Achieved. INCOMPAS members are planning their marketing strategies so that low-income consumers who need service can obtain it through the EBB, and INCOMPAS encourages the FCC and USAC to consider implementing communications to consumers so they understand their competitive options in the program and choose the best option to meet their families' needs. Moreover, INCOMPAS believes that regular communications from the FCC and USAC about funding that will be available and the program's schedule will be important for providers and their management of consumer expectations regarding the length of the benefit.

Collaboration and Coordination with Industry and Consumer Advocates Continues to the Benefit of Consumers. In addition to our ongoing efforts with our members to submit comments in this proceeding to provide our members' perspective and guidance to the Commission on its implementation of the program, INCOMPAS is participating in numerous conversations with consumer and public interest advocates, and other industry associations and companies, to coordinate and collaborate so that as many consumers as possible can benefit from the program. These conversations have been orchestrated and led by Public Knowledge's Jenna Leventoff and have provided significant assistance to the foundation of success for the passage and now

implementation of the EBB. INCOMPAS also is devoting our resources to the effort and stand ready to assist the FCC and USAC in its implementation and administration of the program. We extended this commitment to Commissioner Starks and his staff as they lead the EBB program to success, and we thanked them for their service.

Should you have any questions concerning the foregoing, please let me know.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Angie Kronenberg

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cc: Commissioner Geoffrey Starks
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