

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 12, 2016

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

Dear Chairman Wheeler:

I write to express my concern regarding the potential disruption in funding to Wisconsin's schools and libraries for broadband as a result of recent technical changes made to the Universal Service Administrative Company's (USAC) management portal used for funding E-rate applications.

As you are aware, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) mandated changes to the E-rate program in 2014 that triggered the USAC to launch its "E-Rate Productivity Center" (EPC) portal in late 2015. This web portal was apparently designed to improve the E-Rate application and compliance process used by our nation's schools and libraries to receive funding for essential broadband Internet connections and services.

EPC's rollout, however, has been problematic. Schools, libraries, and service providers have all recently catalogued a series of design flaws that have prevented E-rate applicants from inputting information required for E-Rate funding, and inhibited service providers from retrieving data necessary to offer services and accurate discounts for E-rate approved services.

In Wisconsin, the Department of Administration (WDOA), which has direct responsibility for filing E-rate funding requests for a consortium (TEACH Wisconsin) of 800 schools and libraries throughout the state, recently informed USAC that the EPC portal could only provide data for 133 of the 800 Wisconsin sites that need to be included in its official funding request. In fact, the inherent system failures in EPC required both the WDOA and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction to request an extension of the filing deadline for all applicants, so as not to jeopardize funding for the upcoming school year. While it is my understanding that the requested extension has been granted to give parties more time for the filing process, that does not resolve the systemic problems in USAC's EPC platform and the potential for failure in the application process for the upcoming school year.

In its oversight of USAC and the E-rate program, it appears that the FCC allowed a public-private entity to create and roll-out a web portal with inadequate communication and engagement of relevant stakeholders, and without any rigorous beta testing of the web portal prior to launch. USAC decided to move with the EPC web portal even though it was clearly not ready for primetime. The FCC's lax oversight over this process has contributed to a crisis atmosphere in the E-rate stakeholder community as our nation's schools, libraries, and service providers remain uncertain as to whether they can secure funding for affordable broadband connectivity for the next academic year.

To help me better understand the facts and scope of this imminent problem please provide the following by May 27, 2016:

1. A detailed timeline regarding the rollout of the EPC web portal that includes the specific FCC requirements for the development and initiation of the USAC's EPC web portal (including FCC project deadlines, contractual data, and expenditure information);
2. A description of the emergency measures taken by the FCC to fix the broken EPC web portal as a result of complaints submitted to the agency and USAC by various stakeholders; and
3. Your personal assurance that Wisconsin's schools and libraries and other applicants throughout the country using USAC's EPC web portal will receive the entirety of their approved E-Rate funding on a timely basis.

I appreciate your attention to this matter and given the imminent E-Rate funding deadlines I look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,



Ron Johnson
U.S. Senator