SUSAN M. COLLINS
MAINE

413 DIRKSEN SENATE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20510–1904
(202) 224–2523
(202) 224–2693 (FAX)

COMMITTEES:
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING, CHAIRMAN
APPROPRIATIONS
HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR, AND PENSIONS
SELECT COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510–1904

July 31, 2019

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

Dear Chairman Pai:

I am writing to ask you to delay the adoption of the Report and Order on the Commission's Rural Health Care Program (RHCP), currently scheduled for action on tomorrow's agenda.

I have long recognized the special promise that telehealth holds for rural America. As a native of Aroostook County – the largest county by land area east of the Mississippi, with fewer than 70,000 inhabitants – I know how important health care is to the vitality, and even the survival, of rural communities. Often, these communities struggle to attract and retain the physicians they need to ensure access to quality care. Telehealth services can help bridge the gap by enabling innovative health care delivery in these rural communities.

That is why I was pleased by the Commission's decision last year to recognize that inflation and the growth in demand for RHCP funding necessitated an increase in the annual cap on that program from $400 million to $571 million. Addressing the need for additional funding is critical to the long-term success of the RCHP. Unfortunately, its success has also been inhibited by unnecessarily complex processes. I am concerned that the Report and Order on the August 1 agenda does not address these complexities, and may introduce new ones.

I note that the Commission recently proposed establishing a three-year, $100 million Pilot Program to bring telehealth services directly to low-income patients and veterans. According to the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking adopted by the Commission on July 10, data gathered through the Pilot Program will be used to analyze the benefits that may accrue from support for telehealth services. I am hopeful the Commission will use this Pilot Program to decrease the administrative burdens associated with the RHCP, allowing for more-rapid deployment of emerging telehealth services for rural health care providers and their patients.

For this reason, I urge the Commission to delay the proposed Report and Order and focus instead on properly structuring the Pilot Program to achieve the goal of expanding telehealth services throughout rural America. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Susan M. Collins

Susan M. Collins
United States Senator