



United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
Washington, DC 20240

JUL 24 2020

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

Dear Chairman Pai:

I write to express my support for various calls from the American Indian and Alaska Native communities to extend the application period for the 2.5 GHz Rural Tribal Priority Window by 180 days to January 27, 2021, in response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

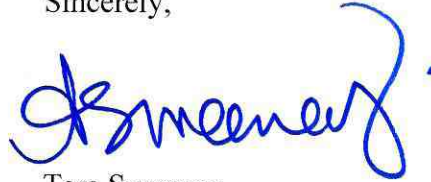
The 2.5 GHz Rural Tribal Priority Window opened on February 3, 2020, less than two months before states and tribes began issuing shutdowns and shelter-in-place orders. Many tribes are still operating under these orders. I urge the Commission to extend the application deadline for the 2.5 GHz Rural Tribal Priority Window to preserve the original intent of allowing tribes ample time and resources to complete their applications.

Now, more than ever before, access to affordable, reliable broadband connections is critical to the health, safety, and resiliency of American Indian and Alaska Native communities. Tribes across the country have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, with many tribes closing all non-essential operations and devoting all available resources to the immediate health and safety of their communities, hampering their ability to complete applications for the Rural Tribal Priority Window. With tribal governments closed, many tribal council members and employees lack the broadband access at home required to successfully complete the application by the deadline.

The 2.5 GHz Rural Tribal Priority Window is a unique opportunity for Native people to access spectrum and broadband services. I have directed my staff to seek out any and all opportunities to support tribes in preparing their applications for the Rural Tribal Priority Window. On July 1, 2020, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Branch of Geospatial Support, announced an initiative to provide technical assistance to tribes in preparing GIS shapefiles for Rural Tribal Priority Window applications. We will continue to make this service available as long as the application window is open.

We truly appreciate your leadership and the ongoing work the Federal Communications Commission has undertaken to expand broadband internet service in Indian Country, including your participation in last September's National Tribal Broadband Summit hosted by the Department of the Interior. As someone who is from the most remote area of the country, I know first-hand the critical nature of connectivity. I look forward to continue working with you on this Administration's priority of increasing broadband access for rural communities.

Sincerely,



Tara Sweeney
Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs

cc: Commissioner Michael O'Reilly
Commissioner Brendan Carr
Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel
Commissioner Geoffrey Starks
Secretary Marlene H. Dortch