

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 12, 2021

The Honorable Jessica Rosenworcel
Acting Chairwoman
Federal Communications Commission
45 L Street NE
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairwoman Rosenworcel,

As members representing rural parts of America, we strongly support the advancement of telehealth telecommunication technologies to improve access to critical care for those that live beyond the reach of brick and mortar physician service establishments. During the COVID-19 pandemic, telehealth technologies proved their worth in connecting patients with their providers when virus containment measures restricted access to medical services. As the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) continues advancing the second round of funding through the COVID-19 Telehealth Program, we request that the Commission prioritize rural areas.

The disruption in access to care caused by the pandemic was particularly acute for patients that live miles away from physician and specialty services. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, rural Americans, who make up 15 percent of the U.S. population, are disproportionately affected by health disparities compared to their urban counterparts. Beyond the pandemic, telehealth will play a critical role in improving patient outcomes for rural patients, ultimately providing superior services at a lower cost to the taxpayer.

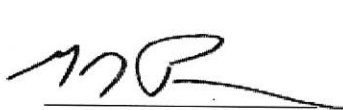
In response to the pandemic, Congress worked in a bipartisan fashion to provide ample funding for the COVID-19 Telehealth Program through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (P.L. 116-136) and again through the Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 116-260). Simultaneously, the previous administration worked in tandem to reduce barriers and expand regulatory flexibilities for telehealth applications across the country. We strongly support the waivers issued by the Centers for Medicare & Medicare Services to expand opportunities for patients and doctors to take advantage of innovative telecommunications services that maintained accessible health care during the pandemic. Notably, the ability for patients to receive care through telehealth technologies in the comfort of their home continue to be a great benefit to our constituents living in underserved rural communities.

Through the first round of the COVID-19 Telehealth Program, physician services in our districts had the resources to greatly improve their technological infrastructure to service their patients. Our providers established real-time audio and video telecommunications platforms that, in many instances, mimicked the type of care they could receive at an in-person setting. Beyond the

pandemic, we strongly believe that telehealth will play a critical role in rural access to health care.

In order to meet our shared goal of closing the digital divide, we urge the FCC to prioritize rural communities in the second round of funding for the COVID-19 Telehealth Program and bring them closer to the quality care that they need. Thank you for your attention to this critical request and we stand ready to provide additional information.

Sincerely,



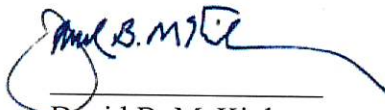
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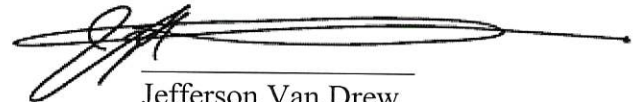
Larry Bucshon, M.D.
Member of Congress



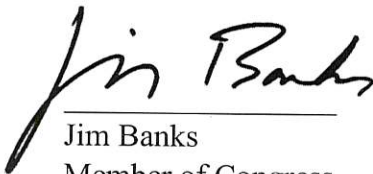
Michael C. Burgess, M.D.
Member of Congress



Gus M. Bilirakis
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Jefferson Van Drew
Member of Congress



Jim Banks
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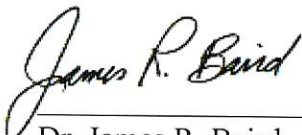
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