



GOBIERNO DE PUERTO RICO

Junta Reglamentadora de Telecomunicaciones
Oficina de Presidencia

December 13, 2017

Hon. Ajit Pai

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

Dear Chairman Pai:

On behalf of the Puerto Rico Telecommunications Regulatory Board (PRTRB), I want to thank you for the time you spent in Puerto Rico this past November and for your cordial visit with me and other Industry members.

As you know, on September 20, 2017, a category 5 hurricane named Maria hit Puerto Rico, passing diagonally through the Island on a Southeast Northwest trajectory. The impact of the storm was island wide, resulting in 91% damage as of September 24, 2017 to the private telecommunication infrastructure, mostly antennas and fiber affecting the Government, Retail, Banks, Pharmaceutical, Developers, Food, Transportation and other businesses. It also resulted in the interruption of the internal public communications of the Puerto Rico Power Authority, the Police Department, the Ports Authority and several municipalities, entities that are first responders in an emergency scenario. As of today, the private telecommunications damages are estimated to be more than one point five billion dollars. Eighty plus days after the storm, 82% of the cell sites are operational.

After a careful evaluation of the impact on Hurricane Maria on telecommunications, we have concluded that it is necessary for Puerto Rico to have a more resilient and redundant telecommunications service, that is driven by different kinds of technology such as wireline (fiber, copper), wireless, satellite, microwave and temporary (cells on wheels, ground or airborne), as well as underground (trenching) and aerial infrastructure. It is particularly important to take into consideration the fact that Puerto Rico is an island, with a central mountain system, that is exposed to year-round heat, humidity and yearly hurricane seasons, as well as storm surges in the coastal areas, with the effect that has in telecommunications. Some remote communities in the mountainous regions of the island may be lost in the massive island-wide effort to get infrastructure restored due to monetary considerations. There are communities across the island, especially in the mountain that may be the

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last communities to receive assistance, and some may never receive support because of the need to target scarce funds to more populous areas.

Also, Puerto Rico confronts poor telecommunications and broadband penetration rate, in comparison to mainland USA, a challenging economic situation, and a significantly lower per capita income than any state in the United States, including the lowest U.S. State, Mississippi.

For those reasons, Puerto Rico is particularly deserving of a new high-cost support mechanism that provides significant incentives to further network build-out, which is very expensive in Puerto Rico, similar to the specific high-cost funding mechanisms for other rural and high-cost areas, available for the tribal lands and Alaska. Federal support funds, including the generous advances of federal universal service support funds you have made available, may not be enough to enable these smaller communities to reconnect and receive a broadband infrastructure that is vital for their advancement in the coming decades, and to attend to the Island's infrastructure challenges.

I suggest it may be providential to begin a discussion to help Puerto Rico; but, as you fully realize, I cannot even begin to think about helping the Island without your help and leadership. Please consider this letter an invitation to begin a dialogue between our staffs, where we can work together to find a solution for many rural remote areas hit by the devastating two-punch hurricane duo: Irma and María. I would be pleased if we could address this topic after the new year with a visit to your offices in Washington, D.C. in January.

Together, I am confident that Puerto Rico will return to being a vital hub for the United States in the Caribbean Region.

Thank you in advance for your consideration for this request.

Sincerely,

~~Sandra E. Torres López, Esq.~~
Chairwoman PRTRB

c: Hon. Ricardo Roselló Nevárez
Governor of Puerto Rico

Associate Members of PRTRB

