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The FCC's Draft EBS Order Is Devastating for the Educational Community says NACEPF and Mobile Beacon

Johnston, RI (June 19, 2019) - The [North American Catholic Educational Programming Foundation, Inc.](#) (NACEPF) and [Mobile Beacon](#) vehemently oppose the Federal Communications Commission (FCC)'s draft [Order](#) regarding Educational Broadband Service (EBS). The proposed Order strips away the educational core of the band, threatens the long-term sustainability of existing programs that serve more than 450,000 low-income and rural Americans today, and jeopardizes the ability for the FCC to accomplish their goals of a fast 5G deployment, closing the digital divide, and connecting rural America.

“With the release of this draft Order, the FCC defies the unanimous recommendations of the educational community, public interest groups, rural educators, the U.S. Department of Education, and Congress to preserve the educational and public interest benefits of this spectrum. Through this proceeding, the FCC had an opportunity to immediately put midband spectrum to use through licensing to educational entities that are committed to closing the digital divide in remote areas long underserved by the commercial sector. Instead, the FCC will delay 5G and rural deployment through a lengthy auction process that will only result in the spectrum being controlled by the same commercial entities that have already been given access to 625 MHz of spectrum below 3 GHz that they are not using to serve these same rural areas.

It is a myth that this spectrum needs to be auctioned in order to make it available for 5G deployment. A large portion of the 2.5 GHz band is already commercial, already licensed, already deployed, and already being used (with EBS spectrum that is leased) to deliver 5G services in the United States today. Maintaining educational eligibility does not hinder commercial deployment; rather, it ensures that educational and public interest benefits are obtained in tandem with commercial use.

The Commission discredits the advancements EBS licensees have made in connecting students and low-income families. The Commission notes that a small percentage of EBS licensees have deployed their own networks, but fails to acknowledge that this is largely due to the decades-long freeze by the FCC. When the freeze was put in place, there were hundreds of pending applications by rural educators for this spectrum. Moreover, in the last decade, every time the FCC has granted a waiver to an educational institution or tribal entity to obtain rural EBS white space, these entities have built broadband networks reaching more rural households with faster speeds and more affordable rates than any commercial offers in these same areas.

This proceeding was an opportunity for the FCC to deliver a public policy ‘homerun’ that would have maximized both commercial and educational benefits. Instead, this Commission has chosen a path that will delay rural and 5G deployment, foreclose any new entry and innovation by educational entities in the future, and threatens the sustainability of the low-cost broadband service that thousands of schools, public libraries, nonprofits, and other anchor institutions rely on from an EBS program to serve their communities today.

At a time when broadband access for education has never been more critical, the 19 million rural Americans on the wrong side of the digital divide cannot afford for the FCC to eliminate one of the most effective tools it had to combat the digital divide for the sake of furthering only commercial interests. The FCC should be creating more tools and incentives for multiple stakeholders to come together to close the digital divide--not eliminating what few tools it has left. This draft Order defies every objective the FCC has set for itself and, if voted in, it will have a devastating ripple effect for America’s most vulnerable population for decades to come.”

- Katherine Messier, Executive Director, Mobile Beacon and Director of Development, NACEPF

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About NACEPF: North American Catholic Educational Programming Foundation, Inc. (NACEPF) is a Rhode Island-based 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization and the second largest Educational Broadband Service (EBS) licensee in the United States. NACEPF’s broadband service, religious and educational programming, and advocacy efforts support education at every level. NACEPF’s worldwide philanthropic efforts focus on providing access to the resources essential to human development and well-being. This includes access to healthy food, clean water, safe housing, education, healthcare, and faith-based services. NACEPF’s wholly-owned subsidiary, Mobile Beacon, broadband service to educational, nonprofit, and community anchor institutions throughout the United States. To learn more, visit www.nacepf.net.

About Mobile Beacon: Mobile Beacon provides high-speed, low-cost, mobile internet access to the anchors of communities: the nonprofits, schools, libraries, and healthcare organizations that provide vital services to millions of Americans every day. Through this broadband service, organizations have an essential tool to fulfill their missions and maximize their philanthropic impact, which allows organizations to access more information, reach more people, and help more in their communities. Learn more at www.mobilebeacon.org.