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Contact:

Lauren Yergeau,

lyergeau@mobilebeacon.org

(401) 934-0550

Educators Lose Key Resource to Close the Digital Divide and Homework Gap with today's FCC Vote

Johnston, RI (July 10, 2019) - “The [North American Catholic Educational Programming Foundation, Inc.](#) (NACEPF) and [Mobile Beacon](#) are gravely concerned about the long-term consequences of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC)’s decision today to dismantle the last 50+ years of public policy that designated a modest portion of licensed spectrum to educational entities to serve their communities. This Order not only abandons that policy but also ignores the record. 95% of all individuals and organizations that submitted comments in this proceeding supported keeping EBS educational and provided abundant examples of ways existing EBS programs are closing the digital divide throughout the U.S. today.

The consequences of this vote are too serious to get lost in the 5G hype. In the last decade, every time the FCC has granted an EBS waiver to an educational institution or tribal entity, those entities built networks that provide more affordable internet access to more rural Americans than anything available directly from the commercial sector. This is a stunning success record. Educational institutions and tribes have produced better results in less time, with less spectrum, and with less financial resources than the very providers that already hold 625 MHz of spectrum below 3 GHz, which is not being deployed in these same rural areas. While we’re pleased the FCC moved forward with a priority window for tribes, this Order unreasonably ‘declined’ to give new, rural educational institutions the opportunity to replicate these successes in the future.

The FCC’s decision also threatens the long-term sustainability of existing EBS programs. 830 schools, 1,019 public libraries, and 4,880 nonprofits currently use our broadband service across the country to benefit students of all ages and abilities. Hundreds of these organizations submitted comments in this proceeding stating that if our service were not available, they would have no alternative means for broadband access or they would be forced to curtail existing programs due to higher commercial rates. With today’s vote, the FCC has jeopardized these programs by eliminating any incentive for commercial entities to continue their partnerships with EBS licensees in the future.

To be clear, this proceeding was never about pitting educational needs against winning the race to 5G. The Commission did not face a ‘binary choice’ at the outset of this proceeding, but it created one with the drafting of this Order. Instead of developing policy, that maximizes both educational and commercial interests by modernizing this band, this FCC has chosen to support only commercial interests.

In sum, the FCC's vote ensured that no entity holding any licensed spectrum for broadband has any obligation to provide any educational benefit moving forward. As a result, at a time when broadband for education has never been more important, there is one less tool available in the federal portfolio to benefit students and close the homework gap."

- 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.