

September 13, 2021



Ms. Marlene H. Dortch
Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
45 L Street NE
Washington, DC 20554

RE: Establishing the Digital Opportunity Data Collection, WC Docket No. 19-195

Dear Ms. Dortch:

Next Century Cities¹ respectfully submits these reply comments in response to the Wireless Telecommunications Bureau's request for public input on the technical requirements for the mobile challenge, verification, and crowdsource processes required under the Broadband DATA Act.² The Broadband DATA Act requires the Commission to "establish a user-friendly challenge process through which consumers, state, local, and Tribal governments, and other entities or individuals may submit coverage data to the Commission."³ It must also verify the accuracy and reliability of the broadband coverage data that providers are required to submit.⁴

The Commission is now asking governments, individuals, and third parties to come forward with information about broadband coverage in their areas. Expanding who can provide network availability information will finally reduce the Commission's reliance on self-reported service provider data. With a more precise picture of where service is and is not, the agency will move a step closer to its goals of universal broadband coverage.

Creating a new challenge process that is robust and user-friendly is essential. Considering that many stakeholders that will submit availability data may have never participated in federal challenge processes before, the standards and thresholds set for challenge submissions must accommodate those with limited resources.

The Commission should also assess and include other performance and affordability metrics such as the throughput speeds experienced by consumers, signal strength, and

¹ Next Century Cities is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) coalition of over 200 member municipalities across the United States that works to bring fast, affordable, and reliable broadband to residents. We represent local elected officials and their appointees, advocating for telecommunications policies that support connectivity in every community.

² *Comment Sought on Technical Requirements for the Mobile Challenge, Verification, and Crowdsource Processes Required Under the Broadband Data Act*, Public Notice, 86 FR 40398 (2021).

³ 47 U.S.C. § 642(b)(5)

⁴ See, 47 U.S.C. §§ 642(a)(1)(B)(i), (iii), (iv), (b)(4), (b)(5), 644(b).

price. These data sets provide insights into the quality of service that consumers receive. Those data points are particularly important in areas where access to service is available but falls short of baseline needs. In those instances, poor service may be analogous to having no service at all.

In developing a new challenge process the Broadband DATA Act requires, the Commission must consider the "need to mitigate the time and expense incurred by, and the administrative burdens placed on, entities or individuals" in challenging the maps. Accordingly, the Commission should put in place requirements and thresholds that encourage feedback from local leaders. Many municipalities do not have dedicated communications or broadband staff. Therefore, the challenge process should be easy for local leaders of varying expertise to navigate and, importantly, invite collaboration. Collecting data from areas that may be incorrectly shown as being covered is imperative but doing so must not place an undue burden on local officials.

The Commission must also concurrently develop outreach and explanatory materials that will help incentivize participation from local and state officials as well as residents. Often, municipalities do not have the resources to hire consultants or new staff to engage in federal proceedings. Developing materials that make the challenge process submission procedures easy to understand will ensure that any municipality can participate. Many states and localities have recently undertaken new mapping efforts to determine where service is in their areas. Ensuring that states and communities can transfer the work that they have already done would also enhance the Commission's data sets.

In addition to providing clear directions for data submission, the Commission should allow users to submit additional information such as signal strength, throughput speed, and pricing information. Under the Broadband DATA Act mobile carriers are required to provide minimum threshold speed information of 5 Mbps download and 1 Mbps upload. However, the Commission may also collect "any other parameter that the Commission determines to be necessary to create a map under subsection (c)(1)(C) that is more precise than the map produced as a result of the submissions under the Mobility Fund Phase II information collection."⁵ As such, the Commission can and should require mobile carriers to submit information that increases the granularity of new mobile broadband coverage maps. Improving broadband data with signal strength, throughput speed, and pricing information does not only support the Commission's goals, but it also gives consumers a better understanding if coverage that meets their needs is available in their area.

⁵ Broadband Data Act at 15.



As the Commission works to roll out new maps that are more granular and accurate, a robust, easy-to-use challenge process is a necessary complement. A meaningful challenge process ensures that historic and well-documented inaccuracies in Form 477 data are brought to light and corrected. Further, increasing the types of data collected will help the Commission verify whether specific areas are covered with broadband service or remain in need.

Respectfully Submitted,

/s/ _____

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