

The FCC and CISA Call on States to Keep Americans Connected During COVID-19 Crisis

June 1, 2020

The Federal Communications Commission and the US Department of Homeland Security's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency have sent a joint letter urging the country's governors and the mayor of Washington, DC, to take steps to ensure that Americans remain connected during the COVID-19 pandemic. The joint letter underscores the importance that communications services are playing during the pandemic by enabling Americans' access to key components of daily life, including telehealth, telework and distance learning.

Key recommendations from the joint letter include:

- States should declare that certain infrastructure and entities are essential to the COVID-19 response to make sure these workers are afforded appropriate resources and access to locations where they work. The joint letter describes a wide range of essential businesses and workers, including those that provide communications support to medical facilities and other care facilities; broadcasters; cable operators; internet protocol television providers; public safety communications infrastructure; internet service; telephone companies; interconnected VoIP; undersea cable; equipment vendors; and satellite operators.
- States should prioritize the distribution of personal protective equipment to communications personnel when available.
- Governments should work with wireless and wireline service providers in processing communications network infrastructure and next-generation 911 projects, with a focus on urgent infrastructure projects identified by the providers.
- States should facilitate the maintenance, repair and provisioning of communications infrastructure and services by making relevant government functions, such as permitting, available online.

CISA separately issued guidance that identifies essential critical infrastructure workers during the COVID-19 response, including communications and information technology workers. However, CISA's list is advisory and not intended to be exhaustive. The FCC and CISA's recommendation is significant, because it calls on states to fill in regulatory gaps by declaring certain communications infrastructure and entities are essential to the COVID-19 response and ensuring that these communications workers are afforded appropriate resources and access.

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