



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

November 12, 2015

The Honorable Doug Collins
U.S. House of Representatives
513 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Collins:

Thank you for your inquiry regarding Windstream's compliance with the Connect America Fund Phase II requirements.

I apologize we were not able to meet your two week reply deadline. I agree that expanding broadband infrastructure is essential in rural communities. Services offered in such communities must be reasonably comparable in both quality and price to the services offered in urban communities. We must ensure that all Americans, no matter where they live, have access to robust broadband networks that deliver the benefits of high-speed connectivity.

As you correctly noted in your letter, on August 5, 2015, the Commission authorized Windstream to receive approximately \$175 million annually in Connect America Fund Phase II support for 17 of the states Windstream serves. In Georgia, Windstream will receive approximately \$25 million annually to provide broadband service to almost 65,000 homes and businesses throughout the state over the next six years. As a requirement of receiving this funding, Windstream committed to providing speeds of at least 10 Mbps downstream and 1 Mbps upstream to all of these locations by the end of the six-year term of support.

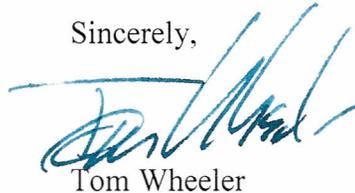
I take Windstream's commitment to the residents of Georgia seriously. To that end, the Commission established rigorous buildout and reporting requirements for all recipients of Connect America Phase II funding, including Windstream. As you mentioned, support recipients must build to 40 percent of their required locations by the end of 2017 and increase their build out by 20 percent each year until 2020, when all locations must be served, including those in Georgia's Ninth Congressional District where the carrier accepted Connect America Phase II model-based support.

All support recipients are required, on an annual basis beginning in 2016, to report to the Commission on their progress in meeting their broadband deployment obligations. I believe that carrier compliance and enforcement of the program's rules are critical to maintaining the integrity of the Universal Service Fund (USF) and ensuring we are responsible stewards of public funding. The Commission has a responsibility to ensure compliance and to identify and deter any future program abuse. Indeed, the Universal Service Administrative Company – the entity designated by the Commission as the administrator of USF funds – conducts audits to ensure carriers' compliance with program rules.

In the event that a support recipient fails to satisfy the obligations it has committed to in exchange for receiving support – for instance, by not building to the required number of locations or by not providing service that meets the Commission’s requirements – it will be subject to support reductions that scale with the extent of the recipient’s non-compliance. We believe that this clear, straightforward approach will create incentives for the recipient to come into compliance as soon as possible, as well as protect the interests of consumers nationwide who deserve and expect access to robust broadband networks.

I appreciate your interest in this matter. Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Tom Wheeler", with a stylized flourish above the name.

Tom Wheeler