

Committee on Energy and Commerce

**Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr.**

***Hearing on “Strengthening Our Communications Networks To Meet The Needs Of
Consumers”***

October 6, 2021

Communications networks play an integral role in the lives of our constituents, and today we are going to examine legislation aimed at strengthening those networks to better meet the needs of consumers. Today’s legislative hearing includes 12 bills, six of them led by Democrats and the other six led by Republicans.

First, I’m pleased we will be discussing H.R. 5378, the Spectrum Innovation Act, which was introduced by Chairman Doyle and Representative Matsui. This Committee has worked for years to address the increasing demand for spectrum. This legislation requires making at least 200 megahertz of new, mid-band spectrum available for auction, as well as requiring the opportunistic use of those airwaves.

Representatives Hayes and Veasey have introduced H.R. 5400, the Preventing Disruptions to Universal Service Funds Act. This legislation extends the Antideficiency Act exemption on the Federal Communications Commission’s (FCC) Universal Service programs until December 2024. Without this extension, the universal service programs including Rural Broadband, Rural Health Care, Telemedicine, E-Rate, and Lifeline programs may be at risk.

As part of this Committee’s ongoing efforts to reverse the alarming trends in maternal mortality, we will consider H.R. 1218, the Data Mapping to Save Moms’ Lives Act. This bipartisan legislation introduced by Representatives Butterfield, Bilirakis, and Blunt Rochester requires the FCC to consult with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to integrate maternal health outcome data into the FCC’s broadband maps.

I’m also looking forward to discussing Representative Rush’s bill to address predatory phone rates and fees that target incarcerated people and their families. It is well documented that connections to friends and family during incarceration help produce better outcomes for people after their release, including lower rates of recidivism. H.R. 2489, the Martha Wright Prison Phone Justice Act, would require the FCC to issue rules to limit the costs that may be charged to incarcerated individuals or their families.

Finally, I’d like to mention H.R. 4208, the Section 331 Obligation Clarification Act, which was introduced by Representatives Pascrell and Sires. This legislation aims to address the lack of local television programming for New Jersey residents.

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I look forward to the discussion today as we continue our bipartisan work to improve connectivity for all Americans.