January 11, 2024

The Honorable Bob Latta
Chairman
Committee on Energy & Commerce
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
U.S. House of Representatives
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Doris Matsui
Ranking Member
Committee on Energy & Commerce
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
U.S. House of Representatives
2322A Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Buddy Carter
Vice Chair
Committee on Energy & Commerce
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
U.S. House of Representatives
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Latta, Ranking Member Matsui, and Vice Chair Carter:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations representing the United States' information and communications industry, we respectfully submit this Letter for the Record for today's Energy and Commerce Communications and Technology Subcommittee (Subcommittee) hearing "Safeguarding Americans' Communications: Strengthening Cybersecurity in a Digital Era." We continue to appreciate the commitment of this Subcommittee to securing America's broadband networks. A key element to securing America's networks and demonstrating America's cybersecurity leadership is completing the Secure and Trusted Communications Networks Reimbursement Program (Program) at the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to support removal and replacement of untrusted equipment and services, which can only be achieved through Congressional action to immediately fund the current shortfall.

This Subcommittee has tirelessly led bipartisan, unanimous efforts to "rip and replace" equipment and services that pose a national security risk to U.S. telecommunications networks with equipment and services from trusted vendors. Nearly four years since Congress passed the Secure and Trusted Communications Networks Act, the effort remains incomplete, leaving networks vulnerable, in large part because the Program is significantly underfunded. At the direction and advice of Congress and the

FCC, carriers began the "rip and replace" process of removing such equipment, with the understanding that they would be fully reimbursed. However, many could be stranded mid-effort.

The clock is ticking to complete this tremendous national security undertaking, and a $3.08 billion shortfall remains. The FCC allocated funding proportionately, providing approximately 40% of needed funds to each applicant. Most applicants, however, cannot complete this important work without full funding, and the likelihood of network degradation or even failure, leaving communities vulnerable and unserved, is growing. Failure to fully fund the Program means that untrusted equipment is still in service today, including some near military bases, airports, and other areas of strategic importance. In part because of the funding shortfall, the FCC has begun to grant extensions to deadlines to complete this work, but as Chairwoman Rosenworcel stated in an update to Congress, "the grant of these extensions does not lessen the urgency for a fully funded Reimbursement Program."[1]

All carriers participating in the Program urgently want to complete the transition to secure and trusted networks. They take national security and network security seriously and are working diligently to completely remove equipment determined to pose a security threat from American networks. While the United States has taken a leadership position internationally about the risks of untrusted communications equipment and services from companies connected to the Chinese government, work remains to eliminate that risk in our own heartland.

The FCC cannot provide additional resources for this Program – only Congress can provide funding to resolve the shortfall. Every day that passes without addressing this national security threat is another day that American networks remain at risk. Congress must immediately prioritize this national security emergency and fully fund the Program.

Sincerely,

Competitive Carriers Association
Information Technology Industry Council (ITI)
NATE: The Communications Infrastructure Contractors Association
NTCA – The Rural Broadband Association
Rural Wireless Association
Telecommunications Industry Association
Wireless Infrastructure Association
WISPA – Broadband Without Boundaries
WTA — Advocates for Rural Broadband

cc:
The Honorable Cathy McMorris Rodgers, Chair, House Committee on Energy & Commerce
The Honorable Frank Pallone, Jr., Ranking Member, House Committee on Energy & Commerce

[1] Letter from Jessica Rosenworcel, Chairwoman, Federal Communications Commission, to the Honorable Frank Pallone et al. at 2 (Oct. 10, 2023), https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DOC-397596A1.pdf.