

# U.S. Sen. Baldwin: Baldwin and bipartisan colleagues to FCC: Wireless coverage map falls short

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*Baldwin calls on FCC to Extend Challenge Process for Map to Determine \$4.53 Billion in Rural Broadband Support*

WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin, a member of the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee, joined a bipartisan group of 30 senators in calling on the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to extend the challenge process for the map of eligible areas for Mobility Fund Phase II support. The FCC’s presumptive eligibility map will help determine up to \$4.53 billion in support for rural wireless broadband expansion over the next 10 years.

“While you have noted that state, local, and Tribal governments can participate in the challenge process, absent additional direction, they may remain unaware or unprepared to do so. We appreciate and encourage additional outreach to state, local, and Tribal governments on how they can participate in the challenge process,” the Senators wrote.

The Senators, led by U.S. Senators Roger Wicker (R-MS), Maggie Hassan (D-NH) and Jerry Moran (R-KS), have asked the FCC to extend the challenge process window by 90 days to allow additional outreach to stakeholders, and to allow challengers to assemble the necessary data to challenge the eligibility map in their area.

In addition to Senators Baldwin, Wicker, Hassan and Moran, the letter was signed by Brian Schatz (D-HI), Roy Blunt (R-MO), Angus King (I-ME), Cory Gardner (R-CO), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Pat Roberts (R-KS), Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), James Lankford (R-OK), Ron Wyden (D-OR), Richard Shelby (R-AL), Cindy Hyde-Smith (R-MS), Patrick

Leahy (D-VT), Ron Johnson (R-WI), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Todd Young (R-IN), Thom Tillis (R-NC), Christopher Coons (D-DE), Claire McCaskill (D-MO), Kamala Harris (D-CA), Tina Smith (D-MN), Tom Udall (D-NM), Catherine Cortez-Masto (D-NV), Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), Doug Jones (D-AL), Edward Markey (D-MA) and Deborah Fischer (D-NE).

The full letter is available here and below. An online version of this release is available here.

Dear Chairman Pai:

As you know, many of us have expressed concern about the accuracy of the Federal Communications Commission's map of eligible areas for Mobility Fund Phase II Support (MFII). This map is intended to reflect areas that lack unsubsidized mobile 4G LTE service, but it unfortunately falls short of an accurate depiction of areas in need of universal service support. Therefore, the FCC's challenge process will play an outsized role in determining appropriate eligible areas for MFII support. Communities in our states that are not initially eligible or successfully challenged will be ineligible for up to \$4.53 billion in support over the next 10 years, exacerbating the digital divide and denying fundamental economic and safety opportunities to rural communities.

While you have noted that state, local, and Tribal governments can participate in the challenge process, absent additional direction, they may remain unaware or unprepared to do so. We appreciate and encourage additional outreach to state, local, and Tribal governments on how they can participate in the challenge process. However, with less than 100 days remaining and additional state outreach presentations not yet completed, MFII challengers will struggle within the current timeframe to provide requisite information that will correct significant flaws in the current map. Additionally, the parameters for challenges have already changed once during the existing challenge timeframe through the Order on Reconsideration on April 30, 2018, altering existing measurements for challenges.

In recent testimony before the Senate Appropriations Committee, you expressed that the FCC has "some flexibility [for] an extension of time" to ensure sufficient time for state and local governments, as well as carriers and other potential challengers, such as state farm bureaus, to fully participate in the process. To provide this additional time and encourage participation in the challenge process, we urge you to extend the current challenge process window by 90 days.

The MFII process presents an opportunity to take significant steps to address the digital divide and preserve and expand mobile broadband in rural areas. We strongly urge you to ensure this opportunity is available to all communities deserving support through compiling accurate data that reflects our constituents' experience, including providing additional time for challengers to submit data, conducting additional information sessions for state, local, and Tribal governments, and providing Congress with an update on final eligible areas before conducting an auction of support.