



Federal Communications Commission
Washington, D.C. 20554

April 3, 2020

Mr. Alexander Hunt
Chief, Information Policy Branch
Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs
Office of Management and Budget
Washington, D.C. 20503

Dear Mr. Hunt:

The Federal Communications Commission (Commission) requests OMB approval to submit the information collection described herein under the “emergency processing” provision of the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) of 1995 (5 C.F.R. § 1320.13). The Commission is requesting clearance for a new information collection entitled: *Promoting Telehealth for Low-Income Consumers and COVID-19 Telehealth Program*. We respectfully request OMB approval for this collection by April 8, 2020.

On April 1, 2020, the Commission adopted a Report and Order entitled *Promoting Telehealth for Low-Income Consumers, COVID-19 Telehealth Program*, WC Docket No. 18–213, WC Docket No. 20-89, Report and Order, FCC 20–44 (2020). In the *Report and Order*, given the growing evidence of the benefits of connected care services provided through broadband connections, the Commission established a Pilot Program to explore whether and how the Universal Service Fund (USF) can help defray health care providers’ costs of providing connected care services to patients in their homes or at their mobile location, particularly to low-income Americans and veteran patients. Additionally, due to the ongoing Coronavirus 2019 Disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the Commission also established the COVID-19 Telehealth Program, funded through a \$200 million Congressional appropriation under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act,¹ to immediately support health care providers responding to the pandemic by providing funding for telecommunications services, information services, and devices necessary to provide critical connected care services for treatment of COVID-19 or other health conditions during the pandemic. The Commission expects that the COVID-19 Telehealth Program will provide immediate assistance to help health care providers provide connected care services in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, the COVID-19 Telehealth Program is open to eligible health care providers, whether located in rural or non-rural areas, and will provide eligible health care providers support to purchase telecommunications, information services and devices to provide connected care services in response to the coronavirus pandemic. The COVID-19 Telehealth Program will provide selected applicants full funding for these services and devices. Currently the COVID-19 Telehealth Program has a Congressionally appropriated \$200 million budget, and these funds will be available until they are expended or until the current pandemic has ended.

¹ CARES Act, Pub. L. No 116-136, 134 Stat. 281 (2020). The CARES Act appropriates \$200 million to the Commission “to support efforts of health care providers to address coronavirus by providing telecommunications services, information services, and devices necessary to enable the provision of telehealth services” during the pendency of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Id.*

The Commission proposes to initiate this collection to obtain information from applicants that will be used by the Wireline Competition Bureau (Bureau) to evaluate applications and select applicants to receive funding under the COVID-19 Telehealth Program, and make disbursements to selected health care providers. In selecting participants for the COVID-19 Telehealth Program, this information is necessary to select applications that target areas hardest hit by COVID-19 where the support will have the most impact on addressing immediate health care needs, determine funding awards and subsequently issue disbursements. The Commission will begin accepting applications to participate in the COVID-19 Telehealth Program after publication of this Report and Order and notice of OMB approval of the COVID-19 Telehealth Program rules in the Federal Register. As applications are received, the Commission will review the applications, make selections and issue funding awards to approved applicants on a rolling basis until all funding is exhausted or until the current pandemic has ended. The Commission anticipates that information proposed in this information collection will be collected from each applicant on an occasional basis.

As a general matter, we believe that public notice requirements are an essential component of our rulemaking process. In this case, however, in light of the rapid spread of COVID-19 and the increasing need to address this public health crises, requiring the Commission to seek OMB's approval under the regular PRA processing procedures would significantly delay the Commission's efforts to, as expeditiously as possible, assist health care providers in meeting the needs of their patients, which could negatively impact the reduction in the spread of the disease. In response to this pandemic, many health care providers are expanding existing telehealth services and implementing new telehealth services. Thus, the demand for connected care services provided directly to patients in their homes or their mobile locations is skyrocketing. As a result, many health care providers are facing new challenges in technical infrastructure and experiencing staffing issues. The rules and related requirements adopted in the *Report and Order* related to the COVID-19 Telehealth Program are intended to quickly respond to the public health emergency brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 Telehealth Program is one piece of a comprehensive approach to reducing barriers to telehealth services for health care providers and their patients throughout the country in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This program also complements the work of other agencies addressing the pandemic as well.

Due to the emergency nature of this request, the Commission is requesting a waiver of all notice and comment periods due to the unprecedented nature of this pandemic and the need for immediate action. The Commission will conduct all the necessary regular submission requirements under the PRA after approval of this emergency request.

The Commission's staff is ready and eager to work with your PRA Desk Officer to immediately provide any additional information needed to assure OMB's approval of this emergency request by April 8, 2020.

Sincerely,



Mindy Ginsburg
Deputy Managing Director
Office of Managing Director
Federal Communications Commission