

# COVID-19: What Communications Service Providers Need to Know – May 11, 2020

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As the COVID-19 pandemic rapidly unfolds, the Federal Communications Commission (“FCC”) has been active to keep communications services available through various waivers, extensions, and other regulatory relief. Kelley Drye’s Communications Practice Group is tracking these actions and what they mean for communications service providers and their customers. CommLaw Monitor will provide regular updates to its analysis of the latest regulatory and legislative actions impacting your business and the communications industry. Click on the [“COVID-19”](#) blog category for previous updates.

If you have any urgent questions, please contact your usual Kelley Drye attorney or any member of the Communications Practice Group. For more information on other aspects of the federal and state response to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as labor and employment and other issues, please visit Kelley Drye’s [COVID-19 Response Resource Center](#).

## **FCC Approves Fifth Set of COVID-19 Telehealth Program Applications, Moves to Portal-Only Applications**

On May 6, 2020, the FCC’s Wireline Competition Bureau (“WCB”) [approved an additional 26 applications](#) for the COVID-19 Telehealth Program. Under the latest funding round (which is the largest so far), \$11.19 million in funding will go to health care providers in California, Texas, Massachusetts, and several other hard-hit areas. To date, the [Program](#) has funded 56 health care providers in 23 states for a total of \$24.9 million. On May 1, 2020, the WCB announced via [Public Notice](#) that it will no longer accept PDF form applications by email for the Program. Instead, all applications for the Program must be submitted through the FCC’s online application portal available at <https://www.fcc.gov/covid-19-telehealthprogram>. The WCB stated that accepting applications only through the portal will enable it to expedite Program funding decisions.

Congress appropriated \$200 million for the Program and the FCC continues to evaluate applications and distribute funding on a rolling basis. While money remains available, the size and pace of disbursements under the Program continues to increase and providers should take action now to assess their interest and ability to participate in the Program.

## **FCC Highlights Consumer Broadband Service Through Temporary 5.9 GHz Band Access Grants**

On May 4, 2020, the FCC [announced](#) that its decision to grant wireless Internet service providers (“WISPs”) temporary access to 5.9 GHz spectrum is helping boost consumer internet access during the pandemic. To date, the FCC has granted Special Temporary Authority (“STA”) to more than 100

WISPs to access otherwise fallow spectrum in the 5.9 GHz band and other bands. Many providers in rural and suburban communities have reported how the spectrum is helping to address the increased demand for broadband as consumers adjust to stay-at-home orders and social distancing measures. It is likely that the FCC will continue to approve STAs to improve consumer broadband service during the pandemic.

### **FCC Hosts HBCU Presidents' Roundtable on Connectivity during Pandemic**

On May 4, 2020, FCC Commissioner Geoffrey Starks virtually [hosted a roundtable](#) to discuss the connectivity needs at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (“HBCUs”) during the COVID-19 pandemic. This event featured remarks from U.S. Representatives Alma Adams (D-NC) and G.K. Butterfield (D-NC), and brought together leadership from HBCUs across the country. HBCU requests included laptops and residential broadband for students and employees, and funding for HBCUs in the next COVID-19 stimulus bill. Rep. Adams suggested that future COVID-19 legislation should include \$10 million for a technology infrastructure fund for HBCUs to continue their transition to online learning.