United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 18, 2012

The Honorable Julius Genachowski
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20554

Dear Chairman Genachowski,

As reliance on high-speed Internet and mobile communication continues to grow, it is important to recognize that many Americans still rely on their traditional landline phone to engage in commerce, communicate with friends and family, and call for emergency assistance. Nearly two thirds of American households have landline phones, and 62 percent of Americans say the service is a necessity. Unfortunately, this service has become less reliable in certain rural areas due to a call origination, routing, and termination problem that is preventing the delivery of a growing number of calls to customers of rural local exchange carriers.

As you know, representatives for rural carriers have reported a staggering 2,000 percent increase in complaints between April 2010 and March 2011 from consumers who have experienced calls that fail to complete, are delayed, have poor voice quality, lack correct caller ID information, or where the originating carrier simply refuses to place calls to certain rural areas. This problem, commonly referred to as "call termination," "dropped calls," or "call completion," is widespread and has been reported by local exchange companies in 36 states.

The failure to complete calls is having a negative effect on local businesses and people throughout rural America and also presents a serious safety concern for affected consumers. Small business owners who are affected by this problem are rightfully frustrated and demand a solution, noting that in this challenging economic climate, businesses rely on reliable telephone service and cannot afford to lose a business opportunity because of a dropped call. Additionally, incomplete calls raise a significant public safety concern that could yield devastating outcomes if this problem is not effectively and promptly addressed.

Despite efforts by rural local exchange companies, state regulatory commissions, and telecommunications trade associations to identify the cause of this problem, there remain many unanswered questions. We appreciate the Commission's creation of the Rural Call Completion Task Force and the workshop that was conducted with key stakeholders on October 18, 2011 to examine the extent of and reasons for the call completion problem. We also hope that the industry can continue to work with the Commission to examine the technical problems and help develop meaningful and effective solutions. We remain concerned, however, that this problem will continue to persist and negatively affect rural consumers without continued action and oversight by your agency.

We respectfully request that you update us about the Commission's efforts to identify the cause of this problem. Should your investigation reveal that responsible parties are engaging in activities that violate the Communications Act or a Commission rule or order, we believe it is critical that the Commission takes the necessary actions to protect consumers and ensure that the widespread and frequent occurrence of undelivered calls to rural areas is addressed. We appreciate your attention to our concerns regarding this problem and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

cc: Commissioner McDowell
Commissioner Clyburn