

July 23, 2018

FILED VIA ECFS

Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W., Room TW-B204
Washington, D.C. 20554

**Re: Citizens Broadband Radio Service
Ex Parte Notification
GN Docket No. 17-258**

Dear Ms. Dortch:

We are 182 fixed wireless broadband providers. We serve hard-to-reach places that no one else will: remote farms, schools, libraries, healthcare institutions, and other businesses that but for us would have no broadband or no broadband competition. But we are running out of the critical infrastructure we need to serve rural America: spectrum.

For decades, we have served rural families and businesses using unlicensed spectrum. But that spectrum is becoming more crowded with each passing day. We have potential customers within range of our towers that we cannot serve because we do not have access to adequate spectrum to do so.

But the FCC can help. Continued access to Citizens Broadband Radio Service (“CBRS”) spectrum is vital to our ability to continue serving rural America. And we write to urge the FCC to ensure that census tracts remain available as bidding units for Priority Access Licenses (“PALs”) in the CBRS band. We ask you to reject options that take census tracts off the table and propel rural broadband access backwards instead of forwards. Without census-tract-sized licenses, we will have virtually no ability to acquire protected spectrum in this band. That would be an intolerable outcome that would harm our rural broadband businesses and inhibit our ability to grow, but worse it would harm the millions of consumers for whom mid-band spectrum is the key to high-speed fixed broadband access.

Over the last year, many of us have spoken and written to the FCC to explain why census tract licenses in the CBRS band are critical to rural economic development and our ability to provide broadband to more rural consumers. We’ve provided maps showing that auctioning larger areas will effectively shut us out of the auction. We’ve explained that we’ve already invested in the CBRS band under the current rules by deploying software-defined radios in the 3650-3700 MHz band that can be easily upgraded to operate in the entire 3550-3700 MHz band, reaching more rural consumers within months. And we’ve explained how we’ve curtailed our investments based on the threat that we may not be able to bid for census tract PALs. While our businesses and networks are diverse and independent, we are united that census tracts are the only way that we can participate in the CBRS band auction.

We recognize the national priority of promoting 5G wireless technology. But 5G is not for mobile wireless only. We, too, want to deploy 5G to connect more devices and support precision

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agriculture and other industrial and enterprise solutions. “Winning the race to 5G” does *not* mean we need to let the most powerful companies in the mobile wireless industry define the rules of the road.

Our economy depends on small businesses like ours, and we are poised to invest – if the FCC gets the rules right.

We reluctantly acknowledge that the rules are likely to be changed, that we will no longer have access to seven census tract PALs. But there is no reason why, out of those seven PALs, that the FCC cannot retain at least two census tract PALs in rural areas to facilitate broadband deployment in the areas where we live and work. We urge the FCC, in the strongest possible terms, to preserve our ability, and the ability of other stakeholders, to bid on census tract PALs in rural areas.

Respectfully submitted,

Galen Manners
President
Wave Wireless, LLC
Parsons, KS

Keefe John
President & CEO
Ethoplex
Milwaukee, WI

Chuck Hogg
President
Shelby Broadband
Simpsonville, KY

Mark Radabaugh
President
Amplex
Luckey, OH

Jeff Kohler
Co-Founder
Rise Broadband
Englewood, CO

Scott LePere
President
On-Ramp Indiana
Noblesville, IN

Jeff Crews
Vice-President
Eastern Oregon Net, Inc.
La Grande, OR

W. G. Capshaw
Manager
Capshaw Enterprises LLC
dba Crossroads Wifi
Middleton, TN

Jarel “JP” Pittman
President, Founder
Rodeo Networks/Rodeo Internet
Clarkston, WA

Carl G. (Greg) Huber
Manager
CellTex Networks, LLC
San Antonio, TX

Jeremy Sheets
President
CMS Internet LLC
Mount Pleasant, MI

Seth Johannesen
Partner and Network Manager
101Netlink
Whitethorn, CA

Lori C. Collins
President
SonicNet, Inc.
Eagle River, WI

Ronald van Geijn
President
Eastern Shore Communications
Cape Charles, VA

Jorge Santiago
Chief Technology Officer
BridgeNet Wireless
Ocala, FL

Patrick Shoemaker
Partner
Vector Data Systems, LLC
Crofton, MD

Drew Vermette
Vice President
Tower Net Communications, Inc.
Spring Hill, FL

Randy Cosby
Vice President
InfoWest, Inc.
St. George, UT

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Robert Clark
President/ Owner
Bolt Internet
Prescott, AZ

Jason Pond
CEO & Managing Member
Grizzly Broadband, LLC
Hamilton, MT

Jeff Hardesty
Member
Desert iNET, LLC
Phoenix, AZ

Jeremy Smith
Owner/Manager
Blue Spring Broadband
Providence, UT

Joe Royer
President & GM
Royell Communications Inc.
Virden, IL

Todd Tanner
Executive Vice President
SkyPacket Networks
Cumberland, MD; Scranton, PA

Scott Gibbs
CEO
VGI Technology, Inc.
San Angelo, TX

Jeff Leerhoff, Owner/Manager
Bits Technology Wireless Internet
LLC dba BTWI Wireless Internet
Perry, IA

Adair Winter
Owner & VP of Network
Operations
Amarillo Wireless & AW
Broadband
Amarillo, TX

Jay Domingue
Business Development
REACH4 Communications
Crowley, LA

Jeff Randolph
Owner
Advanced Internet
Yakima, WA

Orion Lukasik
President & CEO
AlignTec Incorporated
Durango, CO

Drew Beverage
VP Business Development
ProValue.Net
Stillwater, OK

William Fowler
President/CEO
Verso Networks
Denver, CO

Atilla Gahbro
Founder & CEO
Subrigo International
Los Angeles, CA

Alex Phillips
President & CEO
HighSpeedLink.net
Harrisonburg, VA

Gregory B. Armstrong
CEO
Surf Air Wireless
La Porte, IN; Elkhart, IN;
Coal City, IL

Kristian Hoffmann
President
Interwest Management Services
Inc. dba Fire2Wire
Salida, CA

Joshua A. Beug
General Manger
Tularosa Communications
Tularosa, NM

Graham McIntire
President & Owner
Verona Networks LLC
Princeton, TX

Kurt Albershardt
Managing Member
Mimbres Communications, LLC
Silver City, NM

Tony Holland
President
Isotech Inc./KCCoyote Inc.
Trimble, MO

Ken Garnett
Chief Technology Officer
Cal.Net, Inc.
Shingle Springs, CA

Ryan Amburgy
Network Engineer
Impulse Advanced Communications
Santa Barbara, CA

Sean Heskett
Owner & CTO
ZIRKEL Wireless
Steamboat Springs, CO

Tristan Johnson
Owner/Member
Wireless Data Net, LLC
Saybrook, IL

Britain Turner
President
AirFi, Inc.
Zebulon, GA

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Catherine A Hartenbower
H. I. Cable, LLC
Lostant, IL

Steve Barnes
Wireless Ops Manager
NLBC
New Lisbon, IN

Patrick Parks
President
SmartBurst LLC
Aubrey, TX

Malynda Nowell
President & Co-Owner
Ridgewood Holdings LLC
dba Net 3 ISP
Midland, Texas

Daniel Peoples
Owner
Resonance Broadband LLC.
Haileyville, OK

Tim Reichhart
Owner
Northwest Ohio Broadband
Coldwater, OH

Greg Hayman
Managing Member
Tecinfo Communications
Leland/Jackson, MS

Steven L. Mason
General Manager
Lighthouse.Net
Sault Ste. Marie, MI

David Cleveland
Managing Partner
DMCI Broadband, LLC.
Hillsdale, MI

Harvern Davis
Network Manager
Crossroads WiFi
Middleton, TN

Warren Kane
CEO
B2X Online, Inc.
Salem, VA

Troy Rasmussen
CEO
Back 4 Wireless
Jackson, MN

Alan Fitzpatrick
CEO
Open Broadband, LLC
Waxhaw, NC

Stephen Lash
President & CEO
Signal Net Broadband, Inc.
Wylie, TX

Zot Barazzotto
President
Clifton Communications, LLC
Clifton, OH

Phillip Randash
CEO/Owner
Northern Skies Wireless LLC
Bismarck, ND

Kevin Robinson
President
Aroostook Technologies Inc.
Presque Isle, ME

Josh Luthman
President
Imagine Networks
Troy, OH

Matthew Thomas
Founding Member
WON Communications LLC
Springfield, MO

Jerry Stephens
CEO
SOS Communications LLC
Georgetown, TX

Chris Felix
IT Manager
Coffeyville Connection/City of
Coffeyville
Coffeyville, KS

Mike Scott
President & CEO
STT Rural Net
Emmetsburg, IA

Neal Silvers
WISP Owner
Backroads Broadband

Tim Cailloux
President & CEO
Southern Internet, Inc.
Fairburn, GA

Anthony Will
VP
Broadband Corp.
Victoria, MN

David Busch
CEO
ZipLink Systems LLC
Queen Creek, AZ

Emiel Butcher
President
Micrologic Inc.
Buckhannon WV

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Nick Bright
Vice President of Technology
Valnet Holdings, LLC
Independence, KS

Eric Williams
Owner
SDWisp
Spring Valley, CA

Mike Whelan
CEO
AirLink Internet Services
Mounds, OK

Brian Gray
Wireless Network Manager
Joink, LLC
Terre Haute, IN

Wes Davis
Owner
Canyon Wireless
Spring Valley, CA

Virginia Lam Abrams, SVP,
Communications & Government
Relations
Starry, Inc.
Boston, MA

Nathan Stooke
CEO
Wisper ISP, Inc.
Mascoutah, IL

Matt Hoppes
President & CEO
River Valley Internet
Williamsport, PA

Ryan Wilkins
Managing Member
Elevated Networks LLC
Oberlin, OH

Chris Soiles
Owner
Rio Cities Internet
Belen, NM

Paul Conlin
President
Blaze Broadband
Marshall, VA

Joseph Falaschi
General Manager
e-vergent.com, LLC
Racine, WI

Daniel Rudnick
President
Advanced Wireless
Santa Maria, CA

Conor Ferguson
President & CEO
WISPr Systems
Batesville, MS

Michael Clemons
President
GigaBeam Networks, LLC
Rich Creek, VA

Roland Houin
President
Fourway Computer Products,
Inc.
South Bend, IN

Spencer Pous
CEO
SJP Network Solutions, LLC
Ft. Walton Beach, FL

Jacques L. Fluker
Chief Technology Officer
Pixius Communications, LLC
Wichita, KS

Colin Wood
CEO
TransWorld Network, Corp.
Oldsmar, FL

Alan Luelf
General Manager
Alsat Wireless
Montgomery City, MO

Joseph J. McGrath II
Owner & President
Texoma Communications, LLC
Sherman, TX

Jason Dabbert
Owner
Leap Communications, LLC
Parker, SD

Roxanne White
CEO
Evertex, Inc.
Everly, IA

Phillip D. Maag
President & CEO
MetaLINK Technologies, Inc.
Defiance, OH

Shane Baggs
President/GM
BEH Communications, LLC
Price, UT

Eden Recor
Owner & CEO
Grand County Internet Services
Inc.
Grand Lake, CO

Kent Winrich
Chief Technology Officer
Open Broadband LLC
Salisbury, NC

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Al Rachide
Managing Partner
Eastern Carolina Broadband
LLC
Pink Hill, NC

Royce Henningson
President & CEO
River Canyon Wireless
Moab, UT

Forbes Mercy
President
Washington Broadband, Inc.
Yakima, WA

Alexander M. Mann
Installation Technician
Win Win Wireless
Houghton, NY

Shane T. Miller
Partner
Celerity Networks LLC
Spearfish, SD

Jeff Rhue
Chief Technical Officer
WiLogic, Inc.
Huntington Beach, CA

Cody Landrum
President & CEO
Southern Broadband
(3rd Coast Internet)
Crystal Beach, TX

Paul McCall
President
Florida Broadband, Inc.
Vero Beach, FL

Joe Gaylord
Owner
COLI
Rapid City, MI

Kevin Voss
President & CEO
Door County Broadband
Door County, WI

Troy Gibson
Owner
Byhalia.net, LLC
Bellefontaine, OH

Garrett Kellner
CTIconnect, LLC
Round Rock, TX

Charles Thomas
Chief Operations Officer
Omnipoint Technology, Inc.
Springfield, MA

Ryan Walker
President & CEO
OACYS Technology
Porterville, CA

Eric Rogers
President
Precision Data Solutions, LLC
Mooresville, IN

Garth Nicholas
CFO
New Wave Net Corp.
Bloomington, IL

Aaron Palmer
President
LR Communications
Leaf River, IL

Kathy Tate
CEO
McMinnville Access Company
McMinnville, OR

Chris Jeske
President
West Orange Wireless Inc.
Winter Gardens, FL

Ryan Grewell
President
Smart Way Communications LLC
Uhrichsville, OH

Brandon Sloan
CEO
Sloan Holdings, LLC
Westernport, MD

Scott Pope
Network and Operations Officer
Arbuckle Communications LLC
Ardmore, OK

Paul Stebbins
Owner
Winfinity LLC
Liberal, MO

Ryan Ellsworth
President
Vegas WiFi Communications,
LLC
Las Vegas, NV

Kris McElroy
SVP of Operations and Partner
360 Communications, Inc.
Durant, OK

Travis Allen
President
Total Highspeed LLC
Springfield, MO

Stuart Robertson
Owner
Veopoint Internet
Longview, TX

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Robert Haas
Network Administrator
BPS Network/BPS Telephone
Company
Bernie, MO

Paul Scortea
CEO
AirFiber WISP LLC
Phoenix, AZ

Jon Truell
President & CEO
Future Wireless Technologies of
Nebraska
Lincoln, NE

Aaron Clark, Vice President Chief
Operating Officer
Future Wireless Technologies
of Nebraska
Lincoln, NE

Bradley Hagstrom
Owner
Jenco Wireless, LLC
Marysville, OH

Jay Fuller
President/CEO
Cyber Broadband Inc.
Cullman, AL

Jimmy Carr
President & CEO
All Points Broadband
Ashburn, VA; Roanoke, VA

Jason Telles
Owner
Gigabeam Internet
Yakima, WA

David Waldrop
Owner
Twin State Wireless, LLC
Demopolis, AL

David Snyder
President
VOLstate, Inc. DBA RevTel.net
Dayton, TN

Michael Meluskey
CTO and Founder
Broadband VI
St. Croix, VI

Anthony Pierro
Chief Technology Office
Wireless Internet Services, Inc.
Visalia, CA

C. D. Tavares
Owner
Grand Avenue Broadband
Wickenburg, AZ

Adam Bates
Operations Manager
FreedomNet Solutions
Byron Center, MI

Reilly Flaherty
President
Hexis Internet
Jackson, WI

Jorge Santiago
Chief Technology Officer
BridgeNet Communications
Ocala, FL

Michael Underdown
MitoTec, LLC
Burr Ridge, IL

Cody Landrum
President/CEO
3rd Coast Internet
Crystal Beach, TX

Troy A. Slagle
Information Technology Manager
Mid-States Services, LLC
Trenton, MO

Mathew Ford
CEO
Avera Technologies, Inc.
Modesto, CA

Matt Lauer
CEO
Solvaris Net LLC
Romeo, MI

Joel White
President
NexGenAccess Inc
Delaware, OH

Paul F. Barton
President and GM
Westelcom Network Inc.
Watertown, NY

Sonja Harris
Director of Company Development
Conifer Communications, Inc.
Sonora, CA

David Rodecker
Managing Partner
Wisp.net
Fountain Valley, CA

Craig Mason
Owner
Vertical Broadband LLC.
Delta Junction, AK

Zachery D. Peres
Vice President
JMZ Corporation d/b/a KwiKom
Communications
Iola, KS

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Gilbert A. Darrell
Horizon Communications
New York, NY

Greg Coffey
AllureTech/CoffeyNet
Casper, WY

Mike Hammett
President
Intelligent Computing Solutions
DeKalb, IL

Travis Mikalson
CEO
TerraNovaNet, Inc.
Key Largo, FL

Kevin Owen
President & CEO/Owner
First Step Internet, LLC
Moscow, ID

Kevin M. Triplett
President & CEO
Softcom Internet Communications,
Inc.
Galt, CA

Ben Mize
Operations Director
Tecinfo Communications, LLC
Leland, MS

Tim Shaw
President
Hill Country Broadband Inc
San Antonio, TX

Kevin Brown
CEO
Quantum Telecommunications, Inc.
Manchester, MD

Andrew Wicker
Director of Infrastructure
Vistabeam
Gering, NE

Kevin Melson
President
Eagle One Wireless\PC Station
Corinth, MS

Marlon Schafer
Odessa Office Equipment
Odessa, WA

Glenn Kelley
President, CEO
Connectivity.Engineer LLC
Racine, OH

Jim Hanley
President, CEO
netBlazr Inc
Boston, MA

Travis Boyd
Owner
Wallowa Valley Networks
Enterprise, OR

Brian Fults
Owner
FulAir LLC
Lake Charles, LA

Pat Wilson
President
The Computer Works
Conway, AR

Michael Lingwall
Operations
Prestige Broadband, LLC
Springville, UT

Aaron Larson
President and CEO
SPITwSPOTS Inc.
Homer, AK

Joel Brick
Owner
Interlakes Wireless
Madison, SD

Douglas Ratcliffe
Owner
Direct Wireless Web
Daytona Beach, FL

Darin Steffl
President & CEO
Minnesota WiFi
Kasson, MN

John Dunbar
Assistant General Manager
MHTC
Mt. Horeb, WI

Ben Blomgren
Owner
JTN Communications, LLC
Farmington, MN

Michael Birnbaum
Managing Member
Cloud Alliance LLC
Plainfield, VT

Fred Moses
Chief Technology Officer
Tri-County Wireless, Inc.
Fenton, MI

Brian Madl
President
Edge Broadband
Whitewater, WI

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Izzy Bocanegra
CEO
Emerald Harbor
Communications
LLP
Destin, FL

AJ Becker
President
Sonic Spectrum Inc.
Durand, IL