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FCC's EBS Vote Attacks Broadband Access for Schools and Low-Income Communities; Ends Educational Resource

July 10, 2019 – The Federal Communications Commission's vote today to dismantle the Educational Broadband Service (EBS) was a short-sighted move that wastes a valuable resource and forecloses a rare opportunity to quickly support rural educators and communities starved for broadband access.

Voqal and Mobile Citizen have been strong advocates for greater EBS transparency, stronger educational use rules and the preservation of educational eligibility. The Commission's decision today to eliminate the educational spectrum reservation and abolish educational use requirements will choke off the educational benefits offered by this unique spectrum band.

Perhaps the worst part of today's decision is to auction off vacant EBS spectrum that the FCC has allowed to languish unassigned for decades. As was noted by dozens of commenters and confirmed in a [robust economic study](#), rural educators and smaller wireless broadband providers lose the most under the new scheme. The likelihood they can gain access to spectrum in an auction is practically zero.

The lone bright spot of today's decision is to allow rural Tribal Nations an opportunity to apply for EBS licenses over their territories. This model has led to broadband delivery in one of the hardest places to reach in the country, and rural tribes deserve an opportunity to gain access to EBS spectrum for their own broadband projects. But rural schools – specifically those in the counties where broadband availability remains stubbornly low – deserve the same opportunity to partner or self-build using EBS spectrum.

Despite an abundance of evidence showing that commercial carriers have failed to build out wireless networks in rural communities, the Commission appears convinced that the only way to license spectrum is through an auction to the same commercial entities who control nearly all spectrum – over 620 MHz already – in the same rural areas where EBS will become available. Voqal remains deeply skeptical this will end the digital divide in rural America.

“Today's vote doubles down on the same auction-driven spectrum policies that have left rural America unserved and low-income students forced to do their homework on Wi-Fi

in McDonald's parking lots," said John Schwartz, Voqal's president and founder. "Instead of updating EBS and expanding on the strong track record of licensees such as Voqal – which is proud of our record of serving schools and low-income communities – the Commission has voted to commercialize a vital public asset."

About Voqal:

Voqal is a national collaboration of EBS (Educational Broadband Service) licensees that work to advance social equity by creating an educated, empowered and engaged public. Voqal makes grants and impact investments, expands internet access and digital equity, offers fellowships and protects the public airwaves. Our efforts focus on the education and enrichment of all, not just those who are well-off socially, economically and politically. For more information visit www.voqal.org.

About Mobile Citizen:

A project of Voqal, Mobile Citizen provides low-cost mobile internet with unlimited data plans exclusively to nonprofit organizations, educational entities and social welfare agencies. Championed by a national collaboration of EBS (Educational Broadband Service) licensees, Mobile Citizen's internet service is available nationwide. We believe that making internet access available at an affordable price advances social equity. For more information visit www.mobilecitizen.org.