

FRANK PALLONE, JR., NEW JERSEY
CHAIRMAN

CATHY McMORRIS RODGERS, WASHINGTON
RANKING MEMBER

ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
2125 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115
Majority (202) 225-2927
Minority (202) 225-3641

September 29, 2021

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Comptroller General Dodaro:

Closing the digital divide remains a shared, bipartisan goal. In recent years, broadband has become increasingly integral to everyday life, connecting Americans for work, education, health care, commerce, and social interaction. The coronavirus disease of 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has underscored the importance of expanding broadband access to unserved Americans. As leaders on the House Energy and Commerce Committee, we have been focused on finding ways to remove unnecessary barriers that impede broadband deployment so that all Americans have access to affordable high-speed broadband service.

In 2018, Congress enacted the RAY BAUM'S Act, which, among other things, advanced efforts to streamline the deployment of broadband facilities on federal property. Specifically, Congress directed¹ the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) to develop recommendations to facilitate the application processes for the “grant of an easement, right-of-way, or lease to, in, over, or on a building or other property owned by the federal government for the right to install, construct, modify, or maintain a communications facility installation.”² NTIA issued a report with these recommendations in October 2020.³

The RAY BAUM'S Act also directed several agencies—NTIA, the Departments of Interior, Agriculture, Defense, and Transportation, the Office of Management and Budget, and the General Services Administration—jointly to develop recommendations for streamlining

¹ P.L. 115-141, Division P, Title VI, § 606(c) (March 23, 2018).

² *Id.*, at § 606(b).

³ See, https://www.ntia.doc.gov/files/ntia/publications/ntia_report_on_section_606c_of_the_mobile_now_act.pdf

siting permit applications.⁴ In 2019, NTIA helped launch and lead the American Broadband Initiative (ABI), which it established, in part, to develop those recommendations. In June 2020, the ABI submitted a Progress Report enumerating actions that federal agencies have taken to identify and remove barriers to deployment, and to leverage public assets to expand broadband access.⁵

The RAY BAUM's Act also required NTIA to report to Congress on federal agencies' efforts to implement these recommendations and any resulting improvements in those agencies' application review processes.⁶ We request GAO review the status of these efforts by the responsible federal agencies and NTIA's oversight of the implementation of these recommendations. Specifically:

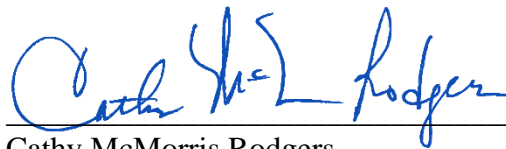
1. How are the relevant federal agencies planning to implement NTIA's recommendations from October 2020 and what is the status of their efforts?
2. How is NTIA overseeing the efforts of the relevant federal agencies and coordinating with them on implementing these recommendations?
3. What challenges do NTIA and the relevant federal agencies face in implementing the recommendations, and how are these challenges being addressed?
4. To what extent have broadband providers faced additional, federal permitting or siting costs in areas where federal permitting processes have not been streamlined, and what is the extent of those costs?

We request that GAO inform the Committee regarding any other issues of concern that it may uncover during its review. If you have any questions about this request, please contact Jennifer Epperson of the Majority Committee staff at (202) 225-2927 or Evan Viau of the Minority Committee staff at (202) 225-3641.

Sincerely,



Frank Pallone
Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce



Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Republican Leader
Committee on Energy and Commerce

⁴ See, <https://www.ntia.doc.gov/blog/2019/american-broadband-initiative-expand-connectivity-all-americans>

⁵ See, https://www.ntia.doc.gov/files/ntia/publications/abi_progress_report_june2020.pdf

⁶ *Supra*, Note 1, at § 606(c)(2)(C)

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike Doyle". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "M".

Mike Doyle
Chairman
Subcommittee on Communications and
Technology

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert E. Latta". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "R".

Robert E. Latta
Republican Leader
Subcommittee on Communications and
Technology