



March 4, 2024

SUBMITTED ELECTRONICALLY VIA ECFS

Ms. Marlene H. Dortch
Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
45 L Street NE
Washington, DC 20554

Re: Ex Parte Filing

Rural Health Care Support Mechanism, WC Docket No. 02-60
Promoting Telehealth in Rural America, WC Docket No. 17-310

Dear Madam Secretary:

Pursuant to Federal Communications Commission’s *ex parte* rules, I hereby submit the following summary of a meeting conducted by members of the Schools, Health & Libraries Broadband (SHLB) Coalition with members of the Wireline Competition Bureau (“WCB”) on March 3, 2025. We discussed the request for a waiver and extension of the 2025 funding request (FCC Form 462) filing deadline in the RHC program,¹ as well as SHLB’s letter supporting this request.²

The following individuals participated in the meetings:

- Kristen Corra, SHLB Coalition;
- Lesley LaFile, Prairie Health Ventures;
- Marci White, Redbud Telecom Consulting;
- Tracy Hines, Federal Funding Group, LLC;
- Matthew Baker, Deputy Division Chief, Telecommunications Access Policy Division (TAPD), WCB;
- Nicholas Page, Division Chief, TAPD, WCB; and
- Philip Bonomo, Assistant Division Chief, TAPD, WCB.

The participants made the following points:

SHLB continues to support the *CHABS Request* for a waiver and extension of the April 1 funding request deadline for the 2025 RHC program filing window for all program applicants.

¹ Letter from Robert Jenkins, Colorado Hospital Association, to FCC Staff, WC Docket No. 02-60 (Dec. 2, 2024) (*CHABS Request*).

² Letter from Kristen Corra, SHLB, WC Docket Nos. 02- 60, 17-310 (Feb. 3, 2024) (*SHLB Letter*).

Various factors have delayed the standard application processing time over the course of this funding year, such as the time required for OMB's final approval of revised RHC forms (which delayed their migration into the new online application system), as well as the inability for applicants to file multiple forms simultaneously (like the Form 460 and an LOA/LOE). Other variables, like requests for additional Form 460 processing time (beyond the standard 30 days) and certain software issues have also contributed to processing delays.

Ms. Hines noted that beginning competitive bidding as early as possible allows healthcare providers to have better and more thorough funding applications, especially since it can take months to work with vendors to determine the need. While the competitive bidding window opens on July 1, she was advised to wait to file Form 460s until the final form was OMB approved and migrated into the new application system (3 months later). Ms. Hines further explained that each form now requires a separate review process, which caused additional and unexpected delays. For example, whereas an applicant could previously file a Form 460 for a hospital, a Form 460 for that hospital's administrative office, and an LOA/LOE at the same time, these forms now require separate filing and review periods. Given these changes, Ms. Hines noted that competitive bidding was essentially pushed to early 2025 (whereas an applicant could typically conduct this process in the fall of 2024).

Ms. Hines also described experiencing other functional issues with the application portal. For example, making revisions like adding a location, moving a location, or changing the contact name for a location created additional review and delays with pending Form 460s.

Ms. White described the following sample of application timelines she and other SHLB members have experienced:

- **108 new HCP Form 460 filings** – The longest period for approval was 97 days. Approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{1}{3}$ were between 30 and 60 days, and most of the remaining took up to 60 days or more (such as one application that was filed 9/17/24 and was approved 80 days later).
- **42 new LOA/LOEs filed after Form 460 approved** – The longest period for approval was 45 days.
- **Form 460 & LOA/LOE (from start to finish)** – The average period for approval was 61 days, with the longest being 97 days.

Ms. White also shared the following example timeline for a pending application: The Form 460/LOE process took 79 days to complete. The Form 461/RFP was posted on 2/27/25 with an end date of 3/27/25. This provides the applicant with only four days to complete the bid review, evaluation, award letter, and contract generation/signature processes.

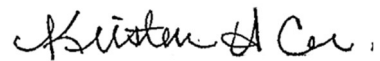
Ms. White further noted that the recommended filing deadline of January 4, 2025 (shared in USAC's newsletter) for filing Form 460s using a RFP might not allow all applicants to meet the current deadline, if there is a minimum 30-day review period for Form 460 approval, minimum 30-day review period for LOA/LOE approval, and mandatory 28 days for the RFP posting.

Ms. LaFile detailed the following steps that occur after the competitive bidding window closes (the Allowable Contract Select Date (ACSD)):

- **Step 1: Bid Evaluation Process (minimum 1 – 2 weeks):** After the ACSD has been reached, the next step is for the HCP organization to review the bids received during the mandatory 28-day bidding period and complete the Bid Evaluation Document. The Bid Evaluation Document includes the scoring criteria from the 461 form/Request for Proposal document. There is also a Notes section to provide comments about each bid received.
 - This process can take up to a week or more depending on the number of bids received.
 - In addition, more time may be required for the evaluation process if any follow up discussions and/or negotiations are necessary between the HCP organization and the selected vendor(s).
- **Step 2: Vendor Notification Letters (minimum 1 week):** Once the Bid Evaluation Document has been completed, the HCP organization will notify each bidder as to the outcome of the bidding process. This is done through the creation of Vendor Notification Letters that are emailed out to each bidding vendor contact. This will include:
 - Vendor Award Letter requesting a contract
 - Non-Award Letter(s)
- **Step 3: Creation of the Contract by the Winning Vendor (minimum 1- 2 weeks):** After receiving the Vendor Award Letter requesting a contract, the vendor will work on the creation of the contract document making sure to include all the elements requested in the award notification letter.
 - For smaller vendors, this process tends to only take approximately 1 week; however, for larger vendors, the creation of the contract document may take up to 2 weeks or longer.
- **Step 4: Contract Signature by HCP Organization (minimum 2 weeks):** After receiving the contract document, the Leadership Team with the HCP Organization will review and obtain approval for signature.
 - For smaller HCP Organizations, this process may only take approximately 2 weeks; however, for larger organizations, this may take up to 3 weeks or even longer.

Accordingly, given the variables and processing timelines detailed herein, the 90-day extension proposed in the *CHABS Request* is justified. This is especially true given the diversity in applicant types (individual vs. consortia) and variations in applicant experience and expertise in filing, all of which are further influenced by their unique encounters with these unexpected application challenges.

Sincerely,



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