

ALA American Library Association

May 1, 2019

Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

**Re: Notice of *Ex Parte*
Transforming the 2.5 GHz Band, WT Docket No. 18-120**

Dear Secretary Dortch,

The American Library Association (ALA) is pleased to offer its views in the above-captioned proceeding concerning the licensing and use policies for the Educational Broadband Service (EBS) spectrum. The ALA has not previously submitted comments in this proceeding but has monitored the comments closely because of the proceeding's potential impact on the ability of libraries to offer mobile hot-spots and other Internet-based services to its patrons and the community.¹

The ALA supports the retention of the eligibility rules that currently preserve the educational and public interest purposes of the EBS spectrum. The existing EBS rules allow licenses to be held only by entities that promote use of this spectrum for educational uses. Under these rules, more than 500 libraries have developed partnerships with non-profit providers of mobile hot-spot services to serve their communities.²

For instance, the Providence Community Library (PCL) in Rhode Island is one of several libraries that loans out Mobile Beacon's 4G mobile hotspots through TechSoup's product donation program. PCL circulated these hotspots to patrons in neighborhoods where home broadband adoption was low. Up to eight users can access each WiFi device at a time, and there are no bandwidth caps or usage limits. This uncapped use of the Mobile Beacon service is particularly important.³ Just one online course with video

¹ Eyragon Eidam, *Wi-Fi Hot Spots for Rent: How Public Libraries Are Changing with the Times*, GOVERNMENT TECHNOLOGY (Jan. 14, 2016), <https://www.govtech.com/network/Wi-Fi-Hot-Spots-for-Rent-How-Public-Libraries-Are-Changing-with-the-Times.html> (examples of libraries implementing hot-spot lending programs).

² Jim Lynch, *How and Why Oakland Public Library Is Loaning Out Hotspots*, TECHSOUP FOR LIBRARIES (Sept. 8, 2017), <http://www.techsoupforlibraries.org/blog/how-and-why-oakland-public-library-is-loaning-out-hotspots> ("Oakland Public Library article").

³ See, e.g., Comments of Mary Klimack, Sand Lake Town Library (filed Sept. 2, 2018) (unless otherwise noted, all comments made in WT Docket No. 18-120); Comments of Jamie Brambley, Fulton County Library (filed Aug. 30, 2018); Comments of Peggy Ganong, New Milford Public Library (filed Aug. 30, 2018); Comments of Becky Rohr, Lucius Beebe Memorial Library (filed Aug. 30, 2018); Comments of Edward Garcia, Cranston Public Library (filed Aug. 30, 2018); Comments of Jill McConnell, Community Library Association (filed Aug. 29, 2018); Comments of Steve Hargis, City of Moreno Valley, California, Public Library (filed Aug. 29, 2018);

can consume 2.5 GB of data. As more content moves online and becomes more video-heavy, the demand for data will continue to explode.

Oakland (CA) Public Library started a similar hot-spot lending program with Mobile Beacon with 15 hot-spots and quickly discovered they had enough demand for 50.⁴ The hotspots also have been used by library staff at mobile events and on bookmobiles to connect patrons with the internet.

ALA thus supports the preservation of the EBS regime because EBS currently plays such an important role in bringing low-cost high-speed Internet access to learners through schools, libraries, and other anchor institutions. ALA opposes proposals to commercialize the EBS spectrum, either by auctioning new licenses or by allowing existing licensees to transfer to commercial parties. Allowing EBS licenses to be commercialized would basically abandon the public interest value of this spectrum and turn the licenses over to large companies that may not have the same incentives as smaller non-profit entities to serve the needs of their communities.

ALA recognizes that the existing use rules governing the EBS spectrum are not fully compatible with the existing and future use of this spectrum for Internet access.⁵ Rather than abandoning these educational use standards, ALA believes that these use rules should be modernized to reflect the need for low-cost, high-speed Internet access. For instance, ALA believes that the Commission should take a close look at the SHLB Coalition's proposal⁶ to require EBS licensees to ensure that a certain percentage of customers subscribe to \$10 per month, uncapped service, such as that provided by Mobile Beacon and Mobile Citizen. Such a use requirement could directly address the homework gap and, if applied immediately as a condition of awarding new EBS licenses in the rural "white spaces" markets, would directly promote greater connectivity for rural Americans.

Additionally, ALA supports NACEPF and Mobile Beacon's proposal for the Commission to expand EBS programming requirements to specifically include service to a broader range of educational institutions that make up today's learning environments—including academic and public libraries and other organizations providing digital literacy programs, ESL training, GED certification, and the like. Such language would encourage EBS licensees not only to provide service to accredited schools, but also to a broader range of entities providing vital educational services outside of a traditional classroom setting.⁷ Doing so would encourage EBS licensees to not only serve students enrolled in their associated schools directly, but to provide service to libraries and other anchor institutions, greatly expanding the public interest benefits of this spectrum.⁸

Comments of Amy Sieving, Wilkinson Public Library (filed Aug. 29, 2018); Comments of Stefanie R. Sullivan, Reddick Public Library (filed Aug. 29, 2018); Comments of Ann Stovall, Indian Prairie Public Library (filed Aug. 14, 2018); Comments of Nicole Steeves, Fox River Grove Public Library (filed Aug. 9, 2018); Comments of Robin Adkins, Edward Chipman Public Library (filed Aug. 8, 2018); Comments of Chillicothe Public Library (filed Aug. 8, 2018); Comments of Karen Kini, Addison Public Library (filed Aug. 7, 2018); Comments of Lynn Dennis, Roselle Public Library District (filed Aug. 7, 2018); Comments of Pamela Leffler, Morton Grove Public Library (filed Aug. 7, 2018); Comments of Jolene Fanciskovich, Coal City Public Library District (filed July 25, 2018); Comments of Phillip Whitford, Braswell Memorial Library (filed July 17, 2018).

⁴ See Oakland Public Library article.

⁵ The existing use requirement were developed when the EBS spectrum was used primarily for educational broadcasting, not for broadband.

⁶ Comments of the Schools, Health & Libraries Broadband (SHLB) Coalition at 5 (filed Aug. 8, 2018).

⁷ See Comments of NACEPF and Mobile Beacon at 28-29 (filed Aug. 8, 2018).

⁸ See "The Impact of Anchor Institutions on a Community's Broadband Connections," Internet2 at 2 (Apr. 2016), available at <https://www.internet2.edu/media/medialibrary/2016/06/22/CAI-Influence-in-Broadband-White->

Finally, retaining the educational and public interest purposes enables the potential for libraries and state library agencies to collaborate with tribal, school and educational agencies to address community digital inclusion needs like the homework gap.

Thank you for your consideration in this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Larra Clark", with a long, sweeping underline.

Larra Clark
Deputy Director
American Library Association Public Policy & Advocacy Office
1615 New Hampshire Ave NW
Washington, DC 20009

[Paper.pdf](#). (“Given the central role a community anchor has and the number of citizens it impacts through one broadband connection, its broadband access has a social, educational, and economic multiplier effect.”).