

Douglas W. Kikoph – Associate Administrator
Office of Telecommunications and Information Applications
National Telecommunications and Information Administration
1401 Constitution Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20230

February 17, 2021

RE: Broadband

Mr. Kikoph:

I'd like to take this opportunity to write to you and your team on the nature of connectivity on the North Slope of Alaska, and in particular, how it has affected Ilisaġvik College from the past and currently.

Ilisaġvik College is Alaska's only tribal college, located in the northernmost Alaska village, Utqiāġvik (formerly Barrow). Utqiāġvik is set within the North Slope Borough, an arctic area comprised of 89,000 square miles, roughly the size of the state of Michigan. The North Slope Borough has eight Native villages within its borders. Utqiāġvik is the largest of these Native villages with approximately 4,500 residents, 82% of whom are Iñupiaq (Alaska Native). The other seven villages are Anaktuvuk Pass, Wainwright, Point Lay, Point Hope, Atqasuk, Nuiqsut, and Kaktovik. Their populations range from 150 to 1,000 and are 95% Iñupiaq. Ilisaġvik College serves approximately 1,800 students each year from across Alaska with its academic, vocational, and workforce development education programming. Of those 1,700 students, approximately 650-700 take classes for academic credit, and half of those are program active students who are actively working toward a degree.

Ilisaġvik College is the only institution of higher education in the Alaskan arctic, and its mission statement is *to provide quality post-secondary academic, vocational and technical education in a learning environment that perpetuates and strengthens Iñupiat culture, language, values and traditions. It is dedicated to serving its students and developing a well-educated and trained workforce who meet the human resource needs of North Slope employers and the state of Alaska.*

Internet connectivity in the region is quite challenging; until late 2017, the only option for connectivity was via satellite. Since then, a subsea cable system became available by Quintillion, providing service to six northern Alaska communities, of which three are a part of the North Slope (excluding Prudhoe Bay). There are plans to connect other communities, which will take years to complete. The North Slope encompasses eight communities in total. Just recently, in February 2021, a local ISP provider just launched an offering to residential homes of download/upload speeds up to 25/5 Mbps. Before then, homes were only receiving between 5-10 Mbps, although rarely did we see 10 Mbps. The price for 25 Mbps? \$499.99/month, with overage fees of \$.25/GB. For perspective, in Anchorage, Alaska, the lowest internet package

offers download/upload speeds up to 100/5 Mbps for a price of \$74.99/month with the option to add a "bucket" for \$40. This is far faster internet for just a fraction of the price we are paying for lower internet speeds.

We understand the environmental challenges in providing faster internet to our communities. It is because of these challenges that we advocate for better access for affordable prices that is provided to other parts of the State and our nation.

At Iḷisaġvik College, we depend heavily on donated bandwidth from Quintillion to operate. At one point (2017), a survey was done to thirty-six (36) tribal colleges in the US, and of the 36, Iḷisaġvik College was paying the highest annual costs (\$250,000/year) for the lowest bandwidth. The extreme cost coupled with low bandwidth had fundamentally affected the ability of the College to provide education and outreach services. Not only for the College but also for our students to access our distance learning classes in the North Slope villages that they reside in. We are very grateful for the donation from Quintillion, and will continue to foster that partnership. It does not, however, assist with our students, who live in North Slope villages that do not have adequate connectivity to their homes and continually pay the extremely high costs for internet.

Since the pandemic, the College has seen higher class volumes via distance delivery because students were no longer experiencing the transportation and childcare challenges that they used to, since everyone was working from/or staying home. Iḷisaġvik College transitioned to full-time distance learning when the pandemic started in March 2020, and we continue to provide nearly all of our classes online. Because of this, our internet bandwidth was at max capacity. Since then we have received COVID-19 relief funding to assist with high internet costs but we must prepare for when this relief funding will no longer be available.

Thank you for your consideration of this letter. Iḷisaġvik College would like to advocate for better understanding of the state of connectivity in our region so that organizations like yours can better assist in grant opportunities for Alaska and other rural areas. Attached to this letter is a powerpoint presentation we recently used at a regional meeting focused around broadband. Should you have questions or would like to reach out to us regarding this letter, please don't hesitate to contact our Dean of Administration, Heather Dingman, at heather.dingman@ilisagvik.edu or at (907) 852-1768.

Quyanaqpak (thank you very much),



Justina Wilhelm, President
Iḷisaġvik College

