



COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY & COMMERCE
DEMOCRATS
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Pallone Remarks at NTIA Reauthorization Hearing

During the Hearing Pallone Announces Bill to Ensure Detained Immigrant Parents Can Contact Their Children Free of Charge

Washington, D.C. – *Energy and Commerce Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ) delivered the following opening remarks today at a Subcommittee on Communications and Technology hearing on “Discussion Draft: National Telecommunications and Information Administration Reauthorization Act of 2018.”*

The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) plays a critical role in establishing and coordinating communications policies for the Administration both domestically and internationally.

Given the importance of the agency, I am disappointed that my Republican colleagues have circulated a discussion draft that does little more than reintroduce [Congressman Tonko’s ACCESS BROADBAND Act](#), which the subcommittee recently marked up and has already reported to the full committee. Mr. Tonko’s bill establishes an office in NTIA to streamline the management of federal broadband resources. I hope that this is not an effort to strip this bill away from Mr. Tonko who worked hard to advance this important legislation.

Besides the contribution from Mr. Tonko, the majority’s bill fails to provide NTIA the authority and direction it needs to address America’s 21st Century needs.

The Administration acknowledges the need for broadband infrastructure investment but President Trump and the Republican Majority have failed to act. We must think big in reauthorizing the NTIA.

In May of last year, Committee Democrats introduced the LIFT America Act, which provides \$40 billion over five years to deploy secure and resilient broadband to 98 percent of the country through a program administered by the NTIA. The LIFT America Act ensures that every State has access to funds to help bridge the digital divide that remains in too many parts of this country – both rural and urban.

As the Internet-of-Things continues to expand, we should increase NTIA's effort to address cybersecurity threats. We must ensure that the Trump Administration's alienation of our international allies does not hamper our ability to protect an open Internet and the free flow of information from Russian and Chinese efforts at the International Telecommunications Union and other forums. We must also ensure that the NTIA has the resources and authority needed to improve public safety communications. Democratic Members have actively engaged on many of these issues and we should consider them as part of any reauthorization.

While limited on substance, the discussion draft does increase NTIA's authorization level to the last Obama Administration request, but this does not reflect the additional tasks and duties we now seek. And, unfortunately, the most important witness for this hearing, Administrator Redl, is not here to answer questions regarding whether the NTIA has the authority and resources necessary to achieve its current mission much less the tasks it should be pursuing.

Before we move forward with a reauthorization, we need the current Administrator's views on the draft legislation.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, as a result of the Trump Administration's policies, thousands of children are still separated from their parents, and we still do not have any sufficient answers about how they are going to reunify these families. Parents have been left wondering where their children are, whether they are being treated ok, and when they will see them again.

Efforts of parents seeking to call their children – to hear their voices and comfort them – have been stymied because of unconscionable rates charged at the detention centers. According to news reports, phone calls at one facility cost \$8 a minute – that's outrageous!

It's bad enough the Trump Administration separated more than 2,300 children from their parents, but now, through these detention facilities, asylum seekers are being extorted. These outrageous rates are one more insult as desperate parents try to weave their way through the bureaucracy to find their children. It is inexcusable.

I call on the Administration to provide detained parents free phone calls to reach their children. It is the least they can do for a policy that never should have been instituted in the first place. I would hope the Administration would take this action on its own, but failing that, I will be introducing a bill today directing the FCC to reinstate the recent inmate calling Order— which covers immigration detention facilities—and to promulgate rules to enable detained parents to call their children without charge.

I would also like to reiterate [the request that every Democratic Committee member made last week that we hold a hearing on how these children are going to be reunited with their parents](#). It would be a complete abdication of this Committee's oversight responsibility for Republicans to refuse to hold a hearing on this catastrophic policy and implementation failure. Secretary Azar must testify before this Committee.

Thank you, I yield back.

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