

Mississippi Public Service Commission



Chairman Dane Maxwell
Mississippi Public Service Commission

Coronavirus outbreak affirms Mississippians generosity and makes clear the need for expanded internet services

As we have all navigated through these times of uncertainty with the COVID-19 outbreak and the impact it has had on our everyday lives, I am again inspired by the generosity and compassion shown by the people of Mississippi. Seeing neighbors, churches, and businesses step up to serve those in need has made me prouder than ever to say that I'm from Mississippi. I know this is another challenge we will get through and I know we will come back stronger than ever on the other side.

Another important issue has been highlighted, as more of us work from home or have multiple residents working or going to school online at the same time. It is vital that all Mississippians have access to reliable, affordable internet service. Our state falls slightly behind on this issue and if we want to be future proof, we must be prepared for future crisis situations. This is something we have to address now.

With the vast majority of us currently working from home and schools being closed, there are many Mississippians that are finding it difficult to do so and to participate in distance education simply because high-speed, reliable access is unavailable where they live. This forces many Mississippians to depend on local hotspots which is counterproductive to social distancing that is vital to flattening the curve of any disease, and is simply not possible as these businesses close to "dine in" services.

The current situation has shed light on the fact that broadband internet is a necessity, not a luxury, if we want our state to succeed in education, healthcare, business, workforce development and crisis preparedness. Affordable access will play a massive role in eliminating many of the challenges of our socioeconomic "divide" in the great state of Mississippi. This will not be a one-size-fits-all effort. It's going to take combination of fiber and wireless technology like 5G to get everyone connected.

Recent action was taken in Washington by the FCC with the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund which pledges \$20 billion to expand infrastructure to unserved communities. There has also been a commitment to significant funding for the deployment of 5G technologies and workforce training to build and maintain our future networks.

It is a main goal of mine that these actions, paired with our effort on the State level to leverage partnerships with the public and private sectors and with our educational institutions, that we narrow the digital gap that hinders opportunity in so many areas across our state.

This will continue to be one of the top priorities at the Public Service Commission, and I am confident we will address this as we have in the past with similar challenges and we will continue moving Mississippi in a positive direction.