



Federal proposals could jeopardize public safety

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For many of us, cell phones have become a necessary component of everyday life, helping us do business, stay in touch with the people who matter most to us and call for help in emergencies.

In Hayward, Sawyer County and across Wisconsin, public safety officers depend on wireless service to respond quickly to emergency situations. We rely on cell phones to assist in search and rescue operations, address domestic violence situations, prevent criminal activity and communicate in areas where police radio is unsecure or unavailable.

That's why a recent proposal by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is so troubling to me — and potentially dangerous for rural Wisconsin. In smaller communities like Hayward and Sawyer County, wireless carriers cannot always justify the costs of building new cell towers. However, there is a federal program called the Universal Service Fund (USF) that helps build reliable communications networks in rural areas.

Unfortunately, the FCC is considering drastic cuts to the USF that could eliminate more than half the support we now receive in Wisconsin. Statewide, we could lose up to \$35 million in annual USF support, jeopardizing dozens of new cell sites every year.

There is much work to be done in Wisconsin to bring reliable cell phone networks to our rural areas. Cutting the USF for wireless will not help this work, and will not help us improve public safety.