Emergency Telecom Team

~~Spectrum and Telecommunications Sector~~ .or

March 28, 2020

Hello Provincial EMO's and Partners,

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are one of ten critical infrastructure sectors that have been identified in Canada. Canadians' access to telecommunications and ICT services during the COVID-19 crises is key for their health & safety and economic well-being. Canadians need access to telecom networks not only to continue to access 911 services, but also to obtain information about the COVID-19 crisis and the evolving emergency and containment measures that are being put in place. Access to telecom services is also required to obtain financial relief being provided to citizens and businesses.

We are writing today to ask for your assistance in ensuring that these services continue to remain available to the greatest extent possible.

While municipal, provincial, territorial or Indigenous jurisdictions have the legislative authority to implement and execute response actions to emergencies within their jurisdictions, ISED Canada retains a significant role in maintaining critical telecommunication infrastructure security and resilience through our relationships with and emergency responsibilities for the telecommunications companies.

As COVID-19 response measures have been implemented across provincial, territorial and indigenous jurisdictions, ISED is receiving reports, from telecommunication companies in a variety of jurisdictions, indicating that either their own employees, their subcontractors or suppliers, are being significantly hindered through blocked access or requests to quarantine, in their ability to maintain telecommunication equipment in the field. These access hindrances are occurring both within and across provincial borders. The work for which access is being blocked is urgent, not routine, and is purely directed to ensuring that telecommunication services, which all jurisdictions are relying on for both essential services and outreach to the public, remain available.

In the course of doing this urgent work, telecommunication companies and their employees must be able to travel to and access the telecom infrastructure during curfews and restricted travel periods in order to prevent loss of service or restore critical communications services.

ISED would greatly appreciate your cooperation in facilitating the access required for this work and in supporting telecommunication and ICT personnel in coordinating the rapid restoration of critical communications networks and continuance of communications retail capabilities supporting both first responders and communities at large during this national emergency.

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Although the most urgent issues have been those associated with maintenance staff getting access to infrastructure there are a broad number of functions that might require ease of movement in order to ensure availability of critical telecommunications services. Specific staff and functions could include the following:

- maintenance and repair personnel who repair, maintain and provision critical network systems including wireless, wireline, and broadcast,
- IT operations staff who maintain data centers and critical systems,
- call center personnel servicing customers,
- store personnel providing emergency service capabilities,
- operations center staff who monitor and assure the networks,
- supply chain personnel who ensure sufficient materials are available in the right places, and
- critical corporate support functions including Human Resources, Payroll, Communications, Security, Procurement, and Real Estate operations that support the customer and internal company networks.

We appreciate your attention to and support in this urgent matter. Please feel free to reach out to me (david.willis3@canada.ca) or your Regional Emergency Telecom counterpart with any questions.

Sincerely,

David Willis

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