

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 25, 2021

The Honorable Jessica Rosenworcel  
Acting Chairwoman  
Federal Communications Commission  
45 L Street, NE  
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairwoman Rosenworcel,

We write to you today regarding the Federal Communication Commission's (FCC) invitation for public comment on how to administer the FCC's Emergency Broadband Benefit Program (EBBP). As you know, the EBBP was created by the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 (P.L. 116-260) and offers eligible households discounts on broadband service during an emergency period related to the coronavirus pandemic. We appreciate the opportunity to share our input and perspective on this vital issue to ensure that the program is utilized to its fullest potential.

As communities across the country continue to grapple with connectivity challenges as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, we have seen unprecedented reliance on telepresence services, including telework, online education, telehealth, and remote support services. Unfortunately, the already-existing digital divide has been further exacerbated by these disruptions, which have highlighted and furthered the broadband gap that too many American households still face. While Congress continues to work with the FCC and other Federal agencies on expanding broadband access to unserved and underserved areas through a number of programs, affordability remains a significant barrier to connectivity for far too many Americans. According to Pew Research, approximately half of non-broadband users' given reason for lack of connectivity is prohibitive cost, and 44 percent of households earning \$30,000 or less do not have broadband.<sup>1</sup> With the establishment of the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program, and

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<sup>1</sup> Anderson, Monica. "Mobile Technology and Home Broadband 2019." *Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech*, Pew Research Center, 23 June 2020, [www.pewresearch.org/internet/2019/06/13/mobile-technology-and-home-broadband-2019/](http://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2019/06/13/mobile-technology-and-home-broadband-2019/).

with proper, forward-looking implementation, we believe we can make a substantial difference in supporting broadband affordability for the most vulnerable Americans.

First, while the EBBP will sunset after the end of the coronavirus pandemic, it presents a unique opportunity for the FCC to look at how to address the broadband affordability issue long-term and starting to think now about the longevity of cost support well beyond this program. As we know, the ultimate end to the pandemic will not signify the end to the digital divide, and the efforts that we put forth now toward encouraging digital equity must represent a durable, scalable model for future digital equity efforts.

Second, it is important to collaborate closely with state/local partners and anchor institutions—first to provide education and outreach about the programs’ availability and incentivize participation within underserved communities, but also to ensure that the FCC can work in tandem with existing digital inclusion efforts on the state level. Community awareness of the program’s benefits and encouraging community partnerships are key to successful implementation, and will pair well with existing state-based programs promoting digital inclusion through adult education, equipment lending, and telehealth initiatives.

Third, the intention of Congress in providing the EBBP benefits was to reduce consumer broadband costs to address the affordability barriers to wider broadband access. We all share the goal of ensuring that families facing difficult financial circumstances during the pandemic are not forced to choose between housing, food, and other necessities and internet service. In order to accomplish that objective, the FCC should set eligibility criteria as broadly as reasonably possible, including looking at how to incorporate newer providers and newer customers, while taking every appropriate measure to ensure that the full value of the program reaches the families that it is intended to benefit. It is incumbent on the Commission to ensure that participating providers are honestly and in good faith passing the full value of the benefit on to their customers.

Finally, it is important to make access to the EBBP benefits streamlined and accessible - both for providers and households, including subscribers of newer broadband service. The program will be most successful when eligible households are readily able to participate without overly cumbersome or restrictive requirements. Similarly, it is vital to include small, local Internet Service Providers (ISPs) in cost-sharing efforts. Many states across the country rely heavily on the efforts of regional ISPs for broadband expansion, especially to rural, historically unserved areas, and ensuring that program entry and reporting is accessible to all providers will contribute greatly to the success of the EBBP in areas with the most need.

Closing the digital divide is of critical importance to our economic future and we look forward to continuing to work with you to ensure every American has access to affordable high-speed broadband, regardless of one’s household income or the zip code of where one lives. We appreciate your history of leadership on connectivity issues and working to close the digital divide. We believe that the EEBP presents an exciting opportunity to address the digital divide

and affordability barriers to broadband access. With proper implementation and collaboration with state and local partners, it can allow all members of our communities to better participate in a 21<sup>st</sup> century society and economy, both during the coronavirus pandemic and beyond. Thank you for your attention to these matters.

Sincerely,



Angus S. King, Jr.  
United States Senator



Margaret Wood Hassan  
United States Senator



Mark R. Warner  
United States Senator

CC: The Honorable Geoffrey Starks, Commissioner  
The Honorable Brendan Carr, Commissioner  
The Honorable Nathan Simington, Commissioner