

The Honorable John Thune
Senate Majority Leader
511 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker of the House
568 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Democratic Leader, Chairman
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Democratic Leader
2433 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader Thune, Speaker Johnson, Chairman Schumer and Democratic Leader Jeffries,

The undersigned organizations believe we are at a critical moment in closing the country's digital divide by addressing barriers that prevent Americans from connecting to home broadband and **urge Congress to create a permanent broadband affordability program to ensure that no household is left offline.**

In an increasingly digital world, affordable internet is essential for students to participate in online learning, for job seekers to search and apply for employment opportunities, and for individuals to access telehealth services and government resources. Access to home internet increases the annual income of low-income American households by \$2,000,¹ yet 16.3 million households are offline because they cannot afford an available Internet connection. This broadband affordability gap accounts for two-thirds of the digital divide and hinders access to economic security and opportunity in every state. It accounts for 59% of the digital divide in states with rural populations that exceed the national average, disproportionately impacts people of color, and is prevalent in the nation's most under-resourced communities. Low-income, Black, and Latinx Americans are more likely to be offline due to affordability.

In 2021, Congress funded the Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act (IIJA), establishing a federal broadband benefit – the \$14.2 billion Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP). The ACP helped more than 23 million households to get or stay online and connected 4.6 million previously unconnected households. However, as states prepare to deploy their share of \$42.45 billion in the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program, the ACP has expired, removing a critical program on which both BEAD and Treasury Capital Projects Funds rely to be successful. Without the support of a subsidy, low-income households will not be able to afford this newly created access to internet infrastructure and states will not be able to reap the full economic benefit of Congress' significant investment in broadband.

Congress has repeatedly recognized the power of broadband to improve the lives of every

¹ American Economic Association, "[Wired and Hired: Employment Effects of Subsidized Broadband Internet for Low-Income Americans](#)," George W. Zuo (August, 2021)

American, investing billions of dollars in rural infrastructure and affordability programs like the ACP and its pandemic-era predecessor, the Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB). **With 16.3 million households currently unable to afford home broadband, now is the time for Congress to establish a permanent program to address the broadband affordability gap and bring our country closer to closing the digital divide.**

Sincerely,
[list of orgs]

Cc: Chair, Senate Committee on Commerce, Science & Transportation
Chair, House Committee on Energy & Commerce