

# TELECOMMUNICATIONS, SCIENCE, AND TECHNOLOGY

Resolution TST-21-37

## A RESOLUTION ON BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE DURING COVID

WHEREAS, the National Black Caucus of State Legislators (NBCSL) has long held that access to affordable, reliable broadband internet is critical for residents of urban and rural areas throughout the United States;

WHEREAS, in 2019 it has been reported by PEW Research Center that 90% of Americans use the internet;

WHEREAS, the proportion of American adults with high-speed broadband service at home increased rapidly and as of June 2019, 95% of the US population has access to fixed broadband with speeds of at least 25/3 Mbps and 91% has access to speeds of at least 100/10 Mbps;

WHEREAS, broadband is critical for educating youth, providing telehealth, accessing jobs, and connecting with each other in the 21st century, and COVID-19 has increased the importance of internet connectivity;

WHEREAS, despite the availability of broadband a digital divide still remains, with data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS), the FCC, and Pew showing that only about 73% of U.S. households subscribe to a fixed broadband connection, thereby leaving them without home broadband access during the pandemic, where the need is critical;

WHEREAS, due to the pandemic many schools are struggling to offer virtual distance learning to youth in low-income urban and rural communities because economic hardships compounded by the pandemic have made broadband unaffordable for some families and individuals;

WHEREAS, some rural communities lack any access to high-speed broadband due to the high cost of broadband deployment in certain areas, among many other factors;

WHEREAS, broadband deployment and adoption are two distinct issues;

WHEREAS, broadband deployment is primarily a rural challenge and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and Congress are taking, and are expected to take, some important steps to address this deployment issue by helping to fund the deployment to unserved areas and to remove regulatory and market-based impediments to deployment in rural areas;

WHEREAS, it is important for there to be a focus on how to further improve broadband adoption; particularly in low-income communities;

WHEREAS, cost as a barrier is not unique to broadband, and the government has a track record of supporting low-income Americans, examples include food, housing, and education;

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WHEREAS, with the onset of COVID-19, the urgency has increased need for the government to intervene and make broadband more affordable and accessible for low-income families;

WHEREAS, the FCC and other federal agencies have used funding from the CARES Act and other coronavirus relief bills to help support broadband affordability and deployment;

WHEREAS, the cooperation of national, state, and local government with the private sector to facilitate investment in broadband infrastructure and adoption will positively impact the longevity of communities; and

WHEREAS, improved broadband infrastructure will facilitate youth staying in and returning to the community, improving opportunities for local businesses, expanding the market potential to attract new businesses, expanding educational opportunities, expanding telehealth options and innovation, improving real estate values, expanding and elevating civic participation, expanding resources for elderly populations to age in place, expanding public safety applications and other municipal services and innovation, and improving overall quality of life for residents.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the National Black Caucus of State Legislators (NBCSL) urges the United States Congress and the President to include an emergency broadband benefit for low-income Americans in the next round of stimulus;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the NBCSL calls on the United States Congress, the President, and the FCC to expand the FCC's Lifeline program to increase the benefit and eligibility for a broadband internet subsidy for low-income Americans in the next Stimulus package, and to make such changes to the program permanent because of the vital nature of Broadband in today's society; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that a copy of this resolution be transmitted to the President of the United States, the Vice President of the United States, members of the United States House of Representatives and the United States Senate, and other federal and state government officials and agencies as appropriate.

**SPONSOR(S): Representative Calvin Smyre (GA), Representative Robin Shackelford (GA), and Representative Karen Camper (TN)**

**Committee of Jurisdiction: Telecommunications, Science, and Technology Policy Committee**

**Certified by Committee Co-Chairs: Representative K.C Ohaebosim (KS) and Senator Audrey Gibson (FL)**

**Ratified in Plenary Session: Ratification Date is December 3, 2020**

**Ratification is certified by: Representative Gilda Cobb-Hunter (SC), President**