

TELECOMMUNICATIONS, SCIENCE, AND TECHNOLOGY (TST)

Resolution TST-23-13

PERMANENT BROADBAND SUBSIDY TO SUPPORT LOW-INCOME COMMUNITIES

WHEREAS, the National Black Caucus of State Legislators (NBCSL) urged Congress in its resolution, Bridging the Digital Divide During COVID (ratified on December 3, 2020) to include an emergency broadband benefit for low-income Americans, and called for a permanent broadband internet subsidy for low-income Americans because of the vital nature of broadband in today's society;

WHEREAS, an Emergency Broadband Benefit Program (EBB) was enacted on May 12, 2021 as a temporary subsidy on monthly broadband services for qualifying low-income households to ensure they could afford broadband connections needed for work, school, healthcare, etc.;

WHEREAS, Congress modified and extended the EBB Program and renamed it the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) within the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act to make broadband service and connected devices available to low-income households at affordable, discounted prices from providers that opt to participate in the program;

WHEREAS, the ACP benefit provides a subsidy of up to \$30 per month toward internet service for eligible households and up to \$75 per month for households on qualifying Tribal lands;

WHEREAS, eligible households can also receive a one-time subsidy of up to \$100 to purchase a laptop, desktop computer, or tablet from participating providers if they contribute more than \$10 and less than \$50 toward the purchase price, and the program is limited to one monthly service and one device discount per household;

WHEREAS, eligibility for the program is for households at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines or if a member of the household meets at least one of the following criteria: received a Federal Pell Grant during the current award year; meets the eligibility criteria for a participating provider's existing low-income internet program; participates in identified assistance programs (i.e., SNAP, Medicaid, Federal Public Housing Assistance, Supplemental Security Income, WIC, Veterans Pension or Survivor Benefits, or Lifeline); participates in a qualifying assistance program and lives on Qualifying Tribal Land (i.e., Bureau of Indian Affairs General Assistance, Tribal TANF, Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations, and income based Tribal Head Start;

WHEREAS, Congress approved \$14 billion for this program which became effective on March 16, 2022, and over 13 million (as of August 8, 2022) households have signed up to date;

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WHEREAS, the FCC adopted final rules for this long-term program, and it has been projected that the ACP will run out of funds in the next 2 years, which would be highly disruptive to the over 13 million households receiving ACP-supported broadband service and could cause those households to lose broadband service;

WHEREAS, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has recently moved to enhance broadband benefit awareness and enrollment, especially through efforts that support trusted messengers like digital navigators, community-based organizations, and government partners; and

WHEREAS, broadband is critical for low-income communities to live, work, and play in the digital economy and it is imperative that these communities continue to have access to broadband.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the National Black Caucus of State Legislators (NBCSL) calls upon the President and the United States Congress to make adequate, congressionally funded broadband subsidies permanent components of benefits, alongside broadband adoption and learning solutions, for those experiencing digital inequity; 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.

Resolution ID: TST-23-13

Sponsored by: Rep. Billy Mitchell (GA)

Policy Committee: Telecommunications, Science, and Technology (TST)