

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 15, 2024

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader Schumer, Minority Leader McConnell, Speaker Johnson, and Minority Leader Jefferies:

We write to urge you to take immediate action to fund the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) and the Secure and Trusted Communications Networks Reimbursement Program. Both of these programs are vital for closing the digital divide, by making connectivity affordable to millions of working families and ensuring providers are able to continue serving rural communities. Congress must leverage upcoming must-pass legislation to invest in these key programs and ensure that families across the country are not left without access to affordable high-speed internet.

As part of the historic Bipartisan Infrastructure Law – the largest investment in broadband in American history – Congress created ACP, recognizing the barrier affordability poses to connecting low-income households. This critical law provides qualifying households a \$30 discount on their monthly internet bill, up to \$75 for households located on tribal lands.

Unfortunately, earlier this month, Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Chair Jessica Rosenworcel notified Congress that, due to high demand for the program, April will be the final full month of funding available for ACP. This potential lapse in funding will jeopardize millions of Americans' affordable access to a reliable, high-speed internet connection. Over 23 million households use ACP to connect to the internet each month.¹ A recent survey conducted by the FCC showed that nearly 80 percent of ACP subscribers would lose or change their internet service plan if the program ceases.² Access to a dependable internet connection is essential in the 21st Century, connecting families to critical needs like work, school, and healthcare, and Congress must not allow the program making connectivity possible for millions of Americans lapse.

¹ ACP Enrollment and Claims Tracker. Universal Service Administrative Company. Accessed March 2024. <https://www.usac.org/about/affordable-connectivity-program/acp-enrollment-and-claims-tracker/>

² ACP Consumer Survey, Federal Communications Commission. Accessed March 2024. <https://www.fcc.gov/acp-survey>

ACP has been an unmatched success – a pivotal catalyst in providing every American, no matter their geography or income, access to the same opportunities an internet connection provides. A recent report found that for every dollar spent on ACP, households receive nearly twice in economic benefits.³ That report did not quantify the significant benefits associated with broadband adoption like increased household income and employment, women’s labor force participation, farm productivity, and lower healthcare costs. Additionally, the benefits of ACP extend beyond the households that receive this transformative benefit each month. A 2022 study found that the ACP reduces costs to deploy broadband in rural areas by 25 percent per household.⁴ A lapse in ACP funding will therefore limit the positive impact of Congress’ historic \$42 billion investment in connecting every unserved American under the Broadband, Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program.

We recognize the important work being done by the Senate’s Universal Service Working Group to reform and modernize the FCC’s Universal Service Fund, while addressing long-term funding for ACP. Taking immediate action to continue funding ACP today is essential to keep Americans connected while this important work is done to enact meaningful improvements, limit waste, fraud, and abuse, and identify a long-term funding mechanism for the program.

A significant funding gap also exists in securing and maintaining our rural wireless networks. In 2020, Congress took steps to protect and strengthen our national security by passing the *Secure and Trusted Communications Networks Act of 2019*, which required companies to remove high-risk Chinese equipment in their communications network by June 30, 2024. The FCC was authorized to reimburse companies for the cost of ripping out and replacing this equipment, but Congress has only provided 39.5 percent of the funding needed to reimburse providers for replacing covered equipment. Small and rural providers are disproportionately affected and without additional funding, many will be forced to eliminate service in critical areas of their networks. Multiple providers have reported that, without additional funding through this initiative, they will reduce coverage areas by over half, with some eliminating service by 90 percent in certain states, threatening communities’ access to basic wireless communication and emergency services. Estimated coverage cuts would be catastrophic for communities across our nation – we cannot let insufficient funds for this effort to widen the digital divide in rural America.

We stand ready to work with you in a bipartisan way to stave off the funding shortfalls for both of these critical initiatives, including how to pay for new investments in each. Many of us have

³ Horrigan, John B. March 11, 2024. “The Affordable Connectivity Program Creates Benefits That Far Outweigh the Program’s Costs.” Benton’s Institute for Broadband & Society. <https://www.benton.org/sites/default/files/ACP-Cost-Benefit.pdf>

⁴ Clark, K., Fazlullah, A., Garner, D., Golnabi, S., Hill, H., Kalmus, M., McQuiggan, M., and Salmirs, E. 2022. “Closing the digital divide benefits everyone, not just the disconnected: An analysis of how universal connectivity benefits education, healthcare, government services, and employment.” Common Sense. https://www.common Sense media.org/sites/default/files/research/report/2022-cs-bcg-closing-digital-divide_final-release-3-for-web.pdf

ideas about potential pay-fors – whether spending offsets or revenue raisers – that can bridge the gaps for ACP and the Secure Networks Program, giving Congress time to consider a longer-term package that sustains these programs, maintains American leadership in telecommunication innovation, and addresses critical national security concerns.

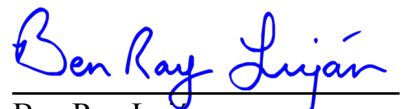
Failing to fund ACP and the Secure Networks Program would be an enormous loss for millions of Americans across the United States and represent a profound erosion in progress made to close the digital divide. As Congress finalizes the remaining FY2024 spending bills and puts together must-pass legislation, we urge you to work with us to ensure American families remain connected.

We appreciate your consideration of this request.

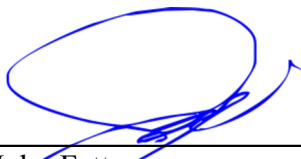
Sincerely,



Jacky Rosen
United States Senator



Ben Ray Lujan
United States Senator



John Fetterman
United States Senator



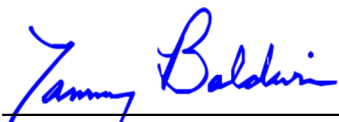
Raphael Warnock
United States Senator



Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator



Jack Reed
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



Peter Welch
United States Senator



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



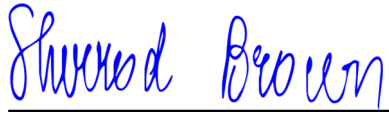
Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



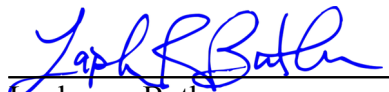
Alex Padilla
United States Senator



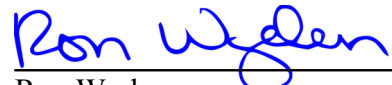
Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



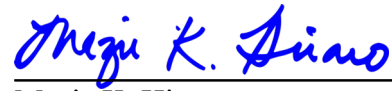
Eaphonza Butler
United States Senator



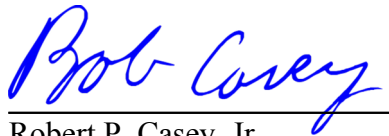
Ron Wyden
United States Senator



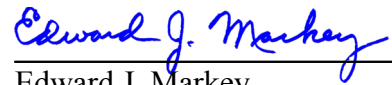
Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator




Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



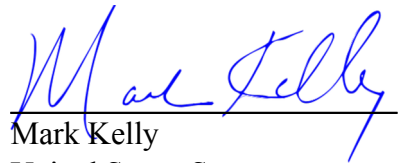
Mark R. Warner
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Kyrsten Sinema
United States Senator



Mark Kelly
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



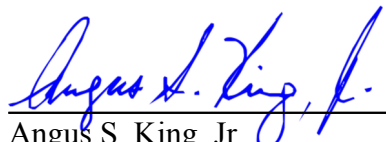
Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Robert Menendez
United States Senator



Gary C. Peters
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator