July 8, 2020

CO-SPONSOR AND SUPPORT THE EMERGENCY BROADBAND CONNECTIONS ACT

Affordable Broadband is Essential for Public Health, Economic Security, and Education

Dear Senators:

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition of more than 220 national organizations to promote and protect the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States, and the undersigned organizations, we write to urge you to co-sponsor and support the Emergency Broadband Connections Act (EBCA), the companion measure to H.R. 6881, and the emergency broadband provisions of the HEROES Act. Even as some states re-open, nearly all people in the nation—from seniors to children—must continue to rely on broadband to work, learn, and meet daily needs as they continue to social distance. The need for connectivity across the country, including in the U.S. territories, has never been greater, exacerbating the consequences of the existing digital divide. Moreover, with many companies ending their commitment to the Federal Communications Commission’s Keep Americans Connected Pledge as of June 30, 2020, fewer people will be able to afford broadband during this public health and economic crisis.

Affordable broadband is critical to:

- **Provide telehealth for everyone** – particularly seniors and veterans. Patients and people with disabilities must have a reliable broadband service at home to take advantage of remote health care and the additional authorization for telehealth in the CARES Act.
- **Ensure a more rapid end to the COVID-19 emergency.** Broadband enables all people in the United States to comply more easily with national social distancing guidelines and local orders, which will mean a faster end to the outbreak.
- **Economic security.** As we attempt to rebuild our economy, workers and small business owners need a quality broadband service to safely work from home, serve their customers remotely or apply for emergency benefits.
- **Fill the “homework gap.”** This fall, students are still likely, at best, to blend at-home and in-class learning. To be effective, high-speed broadband at home must meet the needs of a whole family and withstand intensive network use.

We strongly support the EBCA’s provisions that:

1) **Authorize $8.8 billion in order to guarantee a $50 emergency broadband benefit ($75 in tribal areas) to every eligible low-income household in the country that makes a request to their Internet Service Provider (ISP) and to offer a one-time discount for ISP-provided devices.**
2) **Provide benefits to households within 135 percent of the federal poverty guideline, recently laid off, furloughed, applied for or approved for state unemployment insurance,**
participate in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid, National School Lunch (NSL), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Federal Public Housing Assistance (FPHA), the Veterans Pension and Survivors Benefit, or receive Federal Pell Grants.

3) Improve the existing Federal Communications Commission’s low-income Lifeline program to offer unlimited voice minutes and texting.

Even as some states re-open, the nation is seeing increased infection rates, continued need for older and immune-compromised people to remain at home, and continued widespread reliance on tele-education, tele-health and tele-work—all demonstrating the need for affordable broadband. We strongly urge Senators to ensure that the next COVID-19 legislation addresses this critical need and includes an appropriation of the full authorized amounts.

Thank you for your consideration of our views. If you have any questions about the issues raised in this letter, please feel free to contact Media/Telecommunications Task Force Co-Chairs Cheryl Leanza, United Church of Christ, Office of Communication, Inc., at cleanza@alhmail.com, and Kate Ruane, American Civil Liberties Union, at kruane@aclu.org, or Corrine Yu, Leadership Conference Senior Program Director, at yu@civilrights.org.

Sincerely,

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
AFL-CIO
American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
Access Humboldt
African American Ministers In Action
AIDS Foundation Chicago
Alianza Nacional de Campesinas
American Association of People with Disabilities
American Civil Liberties Union
American Council of the Blind
American Federation of Teachers
American Library Association
American Physical Therapy Association
American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee
Andrew Goodman Foundation
Arizona Council of Human Service Providers
Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC
Association of Assistive Technology Act Program
Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD)
Augustus F. Hawkins Foundation
Autistic Self Advocacy Network
Center for Democracy & Technology
Center for Responsible Lending
Central American Resource Center
National Coalition for Literacy
National Coalition for the Homeless
National Community Action Partnership
National Consumer Law Center, on behalf of its low-income clients
National Council on Independent Living
National Disability Rights Network
National Health Law Program
National Hispanic Media Coalition
National Indian Education Association
National League of Cities
National Organization for Women
National Partnership for Women & Families
National Urban League
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
OCA-Asian Pacific American Advocates
Our Children Oregon
Partnership for America’s Children
PCUN
Pennsylvania Utility Law Project, on behalf of our low income clients
People for the American Way
PFLAG National
Project Appleseed
RCHN Community Health Foundation
Service Employees International Union
South Asian Network
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center
Success Against All Odds
Texas Progressive Action Network
The Arc of the United States
UnidosUS
United Spinal Association
Urbana Champaign Independent Media Center
Workers Center of Central NY
Workplace Fairness