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March 16, 2021

Representative Frank Pallone
Chairman
House Committee on Energy and Commerce
Washington, DC 20515

Representative Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Ranking Member
House Committee on Energy and Commerce
Washington, D.C. 20515

Support Affordable Broadband Service

Dear Chairman Pallone and Ranking Member McMorris Rodgers,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights (The Leadership Conference), a coalition charged by its diverse membership of more than 220 national organizations to promote and protect the rights of all persons in the United States, we write to you in support of H.R. 1783, the Accessible, Affordable Internet for All Act (AAIAA), introduced by Majority Whip James E. Clyburn on March 11, 2021. If enacted, this bill would meaningfully address broadband infrastructure, deployment, and affordability at a time where broadband access means access to health care, employment, education, housing, and other critical services and opportunities. Senator Amy Klobuchar has introduced a companion bill in the Senate, which we also support.

Affordable broadband service is a racial equity and public health priority. Broadband connectivity is now more crucial than ever and can be the difference in getting a vaccine appointment, a job opportunity, or keeping up with schoolwork. The AAIAA is a major step toward connecting more people in the United States and closing the deployment and affordability gaps that so many marginalized communities face. This bill would help provide much needed investments for families, workers, and communities across the country, particularly Black, Brown, and other marginalized communities, to help address the digital divide that still persists in this nation.

The AAIAA expands broadband access, appropriates significant funding for digital equity programs, and allocates an additional \$6 billion for the Emergency Broadband program currently being implemented at the Federal Communications Commission. Moreover, the AAIAA would require the FCC to coordinate with the Department of Agriculture to set up an automatic verification system between the National Lifeline Eligibility Verifier and the National Accuracy Clearinghouse for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, thus easing the eligibility verification for participants in the Lifeline program, which provides



targeted assistance to low-income households for the cost of broadband and telephone service.

Additionally, the AAIAA provides strong protections for workers' rights and union organizing. The AAIAA prevents recipients of the deployment funding from interfering with labor organizing by requiring recipients to remain neutral in workers' organizing efforts, requires first-contract bargaining and binding arbitration, and prohibits subcontracting for the purposes of circumventing a collective bargaining agreement. In addition, the bill requires funding recipients to pay their workers prevailing wages.

Our health, our economy, and our educational competitiveness will not fully recover without affordable broadband. The AIAAA is critical to addressing the systemic inequities that the current public health and economic crisis has laid bare. If you have any questions about the issues raised in this letter, please feel free to contact Leadership Conference Media/Telecommunications Task Force Co-Chairs Cheryl Leanza, United Church of Christ, Office of Communication, Inc., at cleanza@alhmail.com, Kate Ruane, American Civil Liberties Union, at kruane@aclu.org, or Bertram Lee, at lee@civilrights.org.

Sincerely,



Wade Henderson
Interim President and CEO



LaShawn Warren
Executive Vice President for Government Affairs