May 9, 2023

RE: Extending the Affordable Connectivity Program - SUPPORT

Dear Chair Murray, Chair Van Hollen, Chair Granger, and Chair Womack:

The California State Association of Counties (CSAC), representing all 58 counties in California, writes to request that Congress provide continuing funding for the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP).

Today, the ACP’s current rate of expenditure is roughly $500 million per month. Based on this and projected growth, funding for the ACP could be exhausted by Q2 of next year, if not sooner. Without adequate and sustained funding, millions of vulnerable Americans currently relying on the program would see their internet bill increase or be disconnected entirely. As a result, Congress’ bipartisan $42 billion investment in broadband deployment will not meet the goal of universal broadband deployment and adoption.

Broadband access at home is universally recognized as a necessity. It is the essential infrastructure of the 21st century, and we are committed to ensuring that all communities, particularly those who are underserved, gain and continue to have access to affordable, reliable, and high-quality advanced communications services. Lack of high-speed internet access among low-income people, communities of color, and other underserved communities is of particular concern to CSAC, and the ACP has proven critical in getting households in these communities online.

The last three years demonstrate that broadband internet service is indispensable for employment, education, health care, commerce, community building, civic engagement, civic engagement,

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1 “ACP Enrollment and Claims Tracker,” Universal Service Administrative Company (last accessed Apr. 14, 2023), https://www.usac.org/about/affordable-connectivity-program/acp-enrollment-and-claims-tracker/#total-enrolled.
and government services. The high cost of service, however, prevents access for countless households across California and the United States.  

Thanks to Congress' action, the ACP now helps more than 17 million households in America afford broadband internet, with enrollment continuing to increase steadily. These households collectively save more than $500 million per month on internet expenses, while the program drives economic growth, higher incomes, and lower unemployment. The ACP is currently improving telehealth access for more than 3 million low-income seniors and 400,000 veterans, expanding access to education for more than 3 million students, and providing more economic opportunities to more than 1 million federal housing residents. Broadband strengthens communities by creating immediate and long-lasting economic benefits and provides economic improvements for everyone — from rural areas that then become more attractive to businesses and workers, to counties facing aging and inadequate broadband infrastructure. For example, one study demonstrated the employment effects of subsidized broadband resulted in $2,200 of benefits through increased labor force participation.  

Failure to extend the ACP with new funding could result in the single biggest loss of internet connectivity. Without action from Congress this year, millions of households could immediately lose service. In addition, the loss of ACP would reduce the efficacy of Congress' groundbreaking $42 billion investment in the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program. A recent study concluded that the ACP reduces the size of the subsidy needed to incentivize broadband deployment in rural areas by 25 percent. 

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ACP makes BEAD program dollars go farther. Sustained funding is critical as broadband companies and others consider the level of public and private investment needed to fulfill Congress’ goal of universal affordable broadband deployment and adoption.

Thank you for the work you have done already to make high-speed internet affordable and accessible across the country, and for your attention to the critical concerns we have raised. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at gknaus@counties.org.

Sincerely,

Graham Knaus
CEO
California State Association of Counties

cc: Senator Dianne Feinstein
    Senator Alex Padilla
    California House Delegation