

December 22, 2021

Chair Jessica Rosenworcel
Federal Communications Commission
45 L Street, N.E.
Washington, DC 20554

Re: In the Matter of the Affordable Connectivity Program, WC Docket No. 21-450

Dear Chair Rosenworcel:

We commend the Federal Communications Commission for its rapid work to implement the new Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP). Affordable access to broadband is more essential than it has ever been. Policymakers and the public now recognize the importance of affordable access for all people in the U.S., as vast numbers of essential services and civic institutions have moved online. Low-income families will be relying on online access for these services during this period of intense social and economic dislocation.

The Commission should build on the successes and improvements it established in the Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) to begin the ACP. Tremendous effort has been expended to move 9 million people into the Emergency Broadband Benefit program. The transition to the ACP should not leave families behind as the new program takes over. In that transition, the Commission should prioritize:

- Minimizing unexpected new charges due to the lower ACP benefit amount, known as “bill shock”;
- Minimizing the number of households that drop off inadvertently;
- Minimizing consumer confusion;
- Preserving and highlighting the benefit to consumers from shopping among products to obtain the best and most appropriate product for their needs; and
- Ensuring all consumers receive information in a way that they can understand—in appropriate languages and with appropriate disability accommodations.

The transition to ACP should be seamless. Congress made it clear that EBB subscribers should be able to move without friction into ACP. Requiring universal, proactive opt-in will not achieve that goal; a more sophisticated approach is needed. All EBB participants should receive clear and repeated notice that the program is transitioning, and they may opt out or choose an alternative provider at any time. Consumers who might face new or increased out-of-pocket costs by the transition in March should receive especial attention and protection. The Commission should ensure that if consumers lose access to a product, they do not need to reapply to demonstrate eligibility, they can easily continue in the program by selecting a new product or provider.

Consumers and frontline, community-based organizations should receive repeated reminders and educational resources and tools to help them with enrollment in ACP service, and to learn about connectivity products, prices and features. Clear materials describing the ACP complaint process should also be made available. All this information, including ACP consumer rights and responsibilities, should be prioritized for translation into multiple languages and in accessible formats. These materials will also

be critical for community-based organizations and non-profit entities doing ACP outreach into hard-to-reach communities.

Finally, the Commission should utilize the grant making authority it was granted by Congress to immediately establish a grant program that provides funds to organizations that can assist with outreach and education; that process should be as streamlined and easy as possible for small frontline organizations. Similarly, the Commission should use its authorization to hire vendors to conduct culturally competent outreach and to conduct focus groups to collect data and feedback on the entire applications process to create a best-in-class user experience for all people who interact with it, no matter their education, background, access to technology, language spoken or disability.

Robust participation in ACP by both consumers and providers with fully transparent and easy-to-understand processes will not only make significant steps toward universal digital inclusion and thereby improve the day-to-day lives of millions of the people in the United States.

Sincerely,

Asian Americans Advancing Justice - AAJC
Benton Institute for Broadband & Society
Common Cause
Common Sense
The Greenlining Institute
Libraries Without Borders US
National Consumer Law Center, on behalf of its low-income clients
National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA)
National Hispanic Media Coalition
National Urban League
Next Century Cities
NTEN
Public Knowledge
Schools, Health & Libraries Broadband (SHLB) Coalition
UnidosUS
United Church of Christ Media Justice Ministry