

August 5, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McConnell, Leader McCarthy, and Leader Schumer,

As Congressional negotiations progress on a new and badly needed COVID relief package, we urge you to include an Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) to help close the digital divide during the pandemic by providing low-income Americans with a temporary, \$50-a-month benefit for residential broadband service. We believe this smart investment will help address many urgent COVID-related needs for Americans experiencing economic hardship and many communities of color who find themselves on the wrong side of the digital divide.

For most of us, much of our everyday lives – work, education, healthcare, worship, and more – shifted online because of the global health crisis and will remain that way for the foreseeable future. Far too many Americans – disproportionately in communities of color – are being left out in the cold by being offline and shut out of the health and economic benefits of the internet economy.

Even though broadband is available in [95% of American homes](#), [34%](#) of African Americans and [39%](#) of Hispanics don't have residential broadband subscriptions. Additionally, 22% of African Americans, 25% of Hispanics, 18% of Asian Americans, and 24% of American Indians or Alaskan Natives find it [too expensive](#) to access the Internet at home. Even worse, 42% of African Americans and 43% of Hispanics don't have computers at home in addition to 18% of Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders and 7% of Asian Americans that currently lack access to digital devices [and broadband internet](#).

According to the Census Bureau's 2018 American Community Survey, [only 62% of families making less than \\$20,000](#) have home broadband. In our opinion, these persistent disparities are unacceptable especially during this time of unprecedented unemployment and economic uncertainty.

As schools and offices shuttered in March, many broadband providers [took important steps](#) to keep Americans connected, including opening up public Wi-Fi hotspots and suspending service interruptions for non-payment. These efforts were built on longstanding [initiatives to provide](#)

[heavily discounted services](#) to low-income households – efforts which have made great progress in closing the digital divide.

We commend these private sector efforts and the impact they’ve had keeping vulnerable families connected. But they alone won’t solve the problem; we need the federal government to partner in these efforts to help get everyone online.

The EBB is exactly that: a federal partnership to complement existing FCC and provider efforts to get everyone connected. As civil rights organizations committed to addressing the digital divide, we support this approach and urge you to as well.

Broadband is a critical building block to making distance education succeed. Getting everyone connected to broadband internet service is urgently critical as schools across the country grapple with decisions over whether to reopen in-person or remotely this fall. To be sure, there are many [complex reasons](#) for these struggles, but the EBB can at least help make sure that more students have a broadband connection this fall and that families are equipped with the necessary tools to make important decisions about how to best keep their students and family safe.

The EBB will also economically empower low-income Americans, who have been [disproportionately impacted](#) by the pandemic and its economic consequences. [Forty percent of low-income](#) Americans lost their jobs during this crisis; the EBB will help these families get online to look for work and seek out online training and educational resources. The EBB is also critical to providing more Americans with access to telemedicine services, which have rapidly become the industry standard since the start of the pandemic. Being online is a lifeline during this emergency.

Including the EBB in the next COVID stimulus package will not singlehandedly jump-start the economy or fix all that is wrong with distance education. However, working to get everyone connected will help accomplish the bipartisan goals of better education, better healthcare, and a strong economic recovery.

Sincerely,

Asian Americans
Advancing Justice
(AAJC)

African American
Mayors Association
(AAMA)

Hispanic Technology &
Telecommunications
Partnership (HTTP)

Japanese American
Citizens League
(JACL)

Joint Center for
Political and
Economic Studies

Multicultural Media,
Telecom and Internet
Council (MMTC)

NAACP

National Action
Network (NAN)

Asian/Pacific
Islander American
Chamber of
Commerce &
Entrepreneurship

The National Council
of Asian Pacific
Americans (NCAPA)

The National Coalition
on Black Civic
Participation

The National Council
of Negro Women
(NCNW)

National Queer
Asian Pacific
Islander Alliance
(NQAPIA)

National Urban
League (NUL)

Asian Pacific American
Advocates (OCA)

Rainbow PUSH