

# Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) Program Keeps Communities Connected

Access to at home broadband is an essential resource that helps to mitigate the compounding harms experienced by Latino families as well as other chronically under-resourced communities of color in the areas of health, education and to their current and future economic well being. As Congress considers how to best optimize the impact of taxpayer dollars we encourage the establishment of an Emergency Broadband Benefit as a part of any upcoming stimulus package(s) to curb the spread of the virus and protect the health and economic well-being of the Latino community during this unprecedented moment of economic uncertainty.

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*HTTP supports the establishment of an Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) to ensure Americans can stay connected with residential broadband service for the duration of the Covid19 health crisis.*

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## **What is an Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB)?**

The Emergency Broadband Benefit is a short term measure for eligible American households that would extend a temporary subsidy, between \$20-\$50 per month, to purchase or offset the cost of existing any broadband services a participating provider. Broadband providers would apply the benefit as a discount to any plan that meets or exceeds minimum service requirements as defined by Congress or the FCC.

## **A substantive approach to get people connected today.**

EBB represents a significant way to optimize the limited taxpayer funds available to Congress and serve as many people as possible as quickly as possible. EBB accomplishes this goal by leveraging existing program frameworks at the FCC and will be coordinated in collaboration with the country's largest internet service providers. This important benefit helps households most in need who might already be participating in the Lifeline program and provides additional financial support to help those experiencing economic hardship subscribe or stay connected to at home broadband.

The policy choices that are built around this benefit go a long way in making sure that internet service providers are able to quickly adapt their existing plans, existing billing infrastructure and even existing customer service to quickly serve those in need.

## **Who is eligible?**

HTTP encourages Congress keep familiar eligibility standards like (SNAP, Medicaid, SSI) as seen in other programs so that broadband providers and the existing federal infrastructure can serve customers as seamlessly as possible. To enhance the efficiency of this new program, Congress also should accept ISP's existing low-income program eligibility criteria and permit providers to continue to rely on the FCC's National Verifier database to verify eligibility. And in order to ensure that eligibility captures those uniquely challenged by the circumstances of COVID 19, Congress might also consider adopting other consumer eligibility standards such as enrollment of a child in the school lunch program or unemployment.

## Working Together Towards Recovery

*During the COVID-19 health crisis we have seen community-based organizations partner with both government and the nonprofit sector to establish innovative programs and solutions for many new challenges. Based on the success of the Keeping Americans Connected Pledge and other provider initiatives to close the digital divide, we believe that an emergency broadband benefit can have the greatest impact to help the those facing the greatest economic hardship.*

### A Temporary Federal Program

- While administered by the FCC, this national program is separate from the universal service fund.
- The program should be uniform nationwide. An applicant in one state is just as deserving as one in any other state.

### Encourage Broad Participation

- To maximize the program's reach and impact, the program would not import legacy restrictions like Eligible Telecommunications Carriers (ETCs) requirements, which block out some capable and willing providers.
- All broadband providers should be allowed to apply to the FCC for approval to participate – and the FCC should develop an expedited approval process. Existing ETCs and providers with their own existing low-income programs as of January 1, 2020, should qualify automatically.

### Avoid disruption to Lifeline

- A qualifying customer should be able to receive both a standard Lifeline benefit (typically used for mobile wireless service) and the new EBB.

### Benefit Details

- To be effective, the EBB must provide a discount of \$20- \$50 per month.
- The EBB should be applicable toward any home broadband service plan that meets or exceeds minimum service requirements established by Congress or the FCC, as well as toward equipment charges (e.g., router or modem rentals).
- EBB recipients should have the choice to select a higher tier offering (i.e., a faster speed tier) if they are interested in paying for any service charges, fees, or taxes above the value of the benefit.
- The EBB, like the Lifeline program, would be limited to one benefit per household

### Eligibility Rules

- The EBB should be available to all applicants who meet Lifeline eligibility requirements, including SNAP, Medicaid, and SSI recipients, and ISPs' existing low-income program eligibility criteria.
- In addition, Congress may extend eligibility to all applicants who are unemployed or who qualify for the federal school lunch program.
- Broadband providers should be able to confirm applicants' eligibility using the National Verifier or their own eligibility and verification processes. The FCC would be authorized to review and approve a provider's verification processes to ensure it is sufficient for preventing waste, fraud, and abuse.
- Congress should instruct the FCC to update the National Verifier Database currently used for Lifeline eligibility to include the new eligibility criteria (i.e., school lunch eligibility, unemployment).