

Sponsors: Senator Regina Ashford Barrow, Louisiana, Representative Karen Camper, Tennessee

In Support of a Long-Term Broadband Subsidy to Support Low-Income Communities

WHEREAS, the National Organization of Black Elected Legislative (NOBEL) Women urged Congress in its resolution, NOBEL Women Resolution to Bridge the Digital Divide During COVID-19 by Implementing an Emergency Broadband Benefit to include an emergency broadband benefit for low-income Americans, and called for a permanent broadband internet subsidy for low-income Americans because of the vital nature of broadband in today's society; and

WHEREAS, an Emergency Broadband Benefit Program(EBB) was enacted on May 12, 2021 as a temporary subsidy on monthly broadband services for qualifying low-income households to ensure they could afford broadband connections needed for work, school, healthcare, etc.; and

WHEREAS, Congress modified and extended the EBB Program and renamed it the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) within the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act to make broadband service and connected devices available to low-income households at affordable, discounted prices from providers that opt to participate in the program; and

WHEREAS, the ACP benefit provides a subsidy of up to \$30 per month toward internet service for eligible households and up to \$75 per month for households on qualifying Tribal lands. Eligible households can also receive a one-time subsidy of up to \$100 to purchase a laptop, desktop computer, or tablet from participating providers if they contribute more than \$10 and less than \$50 toward the purchase price. The program is limited to one monthly service and one device discount per household; and

WHEREAS, eligibility for the program is for households at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines or if a member of the household meets at least one of the following criteria: received a Federal Pell Grant during the current award year; meets the eligibility criteria for a participating provider's existing low-income internet program; participates in identified assistance programs (i.e., SNAP, Medicaid, Federal Public Housing Assistance, Supplemental Security Income, WIC, Veterans Pension or Survivor Benefits, or Lifeline); participates in a qualifying assistance program and lives on Qualifying Tribal Land (i.e., Bureau of Indian Affairs General Assistance, Tribal TANF, Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations, and income based Tribal Head Start; and

WHEREAS, Congress approved \$14 billion for this program which became effective on March 16, 2022, and over 18 million (as of May 15, 2023) households have signed up to date; and

WHEREAS, the FCC adopted final rules for this long-term program, and it has been projected that the ACP will run out of funds during the first quarter of 2024, which would be highly disruptive to the over 18 million households receiving ACP-supported broadband service and could cause those households to lose broadband service; and

WHEREAS, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has recently moved to enhance broadband benefit awareness and enrollment, especially through efforts that support trusted messengers like digital navigators, community-based organizations, and government partners; and

WHEREAS, broadband is critical for low-income communities to live, work, and play in the digital economy and it is imperative that these communities continue to have access to broadband.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that NOBEL Women calls upon the President and the United States Congress to make a congressionally funded broadband subsidy a long-term component of benefits, alongside broadband adoption and learning solutions, for those experiencing digital inequity; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that a copy of this resolution be transmitted to the President of the United States, the Vice President of the United States, members of the United States Senate, members of the United States House of Representatives, the Federal Communications Commission, and other federal and state government officials and agencies as appropriate.

Introduced by Senator Regina Ashford Barrow
Louisiana State Senate

Co-Sponsored by Representative Karen D. Camper
Tennessee General Assembly