



NATIONAL GRANGE

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American Values. Hometown Roots.

December 6, 2023

U.S. Representative Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Chair, House Energy & Commerce Committee
2188 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell
Chair, Senate Commerce Committee
511 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

U.S. Representative Frank Pallone
Ranking Member, House Energy & Commerce Committee
2107 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

U.S. Senator Ted Cruz
Ranking Member, Senate Commerce Committee
67 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Securing the Future of the Affordable Connectivity Program

Dear Members of Congress:

For over 150 years, the National Grange has advocated to keep America's rural communities connected. In today's digital world, that connectivity includes reliable access to affordable, quality broadband. That connectivity isn't a given for many in hard-to-reach areas. The Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) is playing an outsized role in bridging the digital divide in rural America and beyond. It's incumbent on Congress to ensure that progress sticks by extending funding and ultimately making the program permanent.

Consumers, families, and small businesses are increasingly going online to find work, do homework, access telehealth, remain active with their faith community, access government resources, connect with friends and family, and so much more. Digital connectivity is increasingly integral to our way of life. Recognizing this reality, in addition to the fact that many Americans don't have the connectivity they need to participate in the digital age because of access and affordability, Congress took two monumental steps as part of its Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA).

First, the Act created the ACP. For rural America, broadband deployment has been toughest in hard-to-reach areas, which in turn causes high costs for internet for rural consumers. The ACP, however, is finally fulfilling the promise Washington made to rural Americans by alleviating the high-cost issue with a subsidy. Better yet, the ACP is a market-driven program that allows the consumer, not the government, to choose their provider. Poverty rates are higher in non-metro areas than in metro areas in every region of the country, and because of its market-driven approach, the ACP is helping rural consumers with limited financial means rise out of poverty faster on their own terms.

Second, Act created the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program. With \$42 billion designated for network buildout in unserved and underserved communities across the country, this program marks a historic investment to bring fast, reliable broadband to rural America.

The success of the two programs are directly linked. There's demand for connectivity in hard-to-reach areas like rural America. The BEAD program will bring network investment there, but if the low-income populations

in those areas can't afford service, the full benefits of the network expansion won't be realized. The ACP is essential to ensure this happens as it creates an opportunity to bridge the affordability gap for those who finally overcome the access gap thanks to Congress.

Extending funding for the ACP is a no-brainer. It also has broad public support across the political spectrum. Polling from the Digital Progress Institute shows that 64% of Republicans support renewing the program along with 70% of Independents and 95% of Democrats.

We've finally reached a point where we are seeing real impact to help folks on the wrong side of the digital divide, and it's time to keep that trend going by extending funding for the ACP before it's too late. Current funding for the ACP is expected to run out by April 2024, but Congress can't wait that long to take action. I urge you to act swiftly to ensure the longevity of the ACP for the benefit of the nearly 22 million American households and counting that are already benefiting from the ACP. The consequences of letting the program lapse would be devastating to consumers and have an irreparable loss of trust in Washington.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christine E. Hamp". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Christine E. Hamp
President, National Grange