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April xx, 2020

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, and Leader McCarthy:

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and the undersigned organizations, we write to urge Congress to provide a low-income broadband benefit as part of the forthcoming Phase 4 COVID-19 Package. The United States is facing an unprecedented emergency, with nearly all people in the nation—from seniors to children—required to work, learn, and meet daily needs while staying at home. The need for connectivity across the country has never been greater, exacerbating the consequences of the existing digital divide, even as fewer people will be able to afford broadband during the crisis. Therefore, we seek \$2 to 3 billion per month for the duration of the COVID-19 emergency to support access to broadband that is adequate to meet the needs of multiple people sheltering-in-place while working and learning via video technology simultaneously.

Affordable broadband is critical to:

- **Provide telehealth for everyone—particularly seniors and veterans.** Patients must have a reliable broadband service at home to take advantage of remote health care and the additional authorization for telehealth in the CARES Act.
- **Ensure a more rapid end to the COVID-19 emergency.** Broadband enables all people in the U.S. to more easily comply with national stay-at-home guidelines and local orders, which will mean a faster end to the outbreak.
- **Fill the “homework gap.”** Children and families stuck at home will be able to engage in distance learning and communication with schools. To be effective, high-speed broadband at home must meet the needs of a whole family and withstand intensive network use.
- **Economic security.** Workers and small business owners need a quality broadband service to work from home or apply for emergency benefits.

With hundreds of millions of people in this country now at home in order to limit the spread of the coronavirus, it is in our country’s national interest to continue as much of our economic and civic life as possible during this time. The below proposals will ensure that the tens of millions of low-income Americans who struggle to afford broadband will have access to an essential communications service:



- An immediate appropriation of \$2 to 3 billion per month for the extent of the crisis and for 30 days following, to support an emergency broadband benefit for all eligible low-income households and the newly unemployed – approximately 60 million households.<sup>i</sup>
- The benefit will offer free service to eligible households paid to their Internet Service Providers (ISPs) at \$50 per month to support 100 megabits per second downstream/10 megabits per second upstream and \$25 per month to support 25 megabits per second downstream/3 megabits per second upstream. These benefits should be doubled in, and tailored for, tribal areas.
- Households eligible for the benefit would be within 135 percent of the federal poverty guideline, recently laid off, furloughed, applied for or approved for state unemployment insurance, participate in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid, free and reduced school lunch, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Federal Public Housing Assistance (FPHA), or the Veterans Pension and Survivors Benefit.
- The ISP would be prohibited from imposing any delay, co-payment, waiting period or limitations for customers owing arrearages.
- Safeguards and existing low-income program infrastructure at the Federal Communications Commission, streamlined where necessary, should be used to immediately get support to those in need. Specifically, an ISP need not be designated an eligible telecommunications carrier but must comply with appropriate FCC program integrity rules.

In the near term, broadband Internet access is necessary for health care, employment, civic engagement, education, and more. We strongly urge Congress to ensure that future COVID-19 legislation and actions address this critical need. Thank you for your consideration of our views. If you have any questions about the issues raised in this letter, please feel free to contact Media/Telecommunications Task Force Co-Chairs Cheryl Leanza, United Church of Christ, Office of Communication, Inc., at [cleanza@alhmail.com](mailto:cleanza@alhmail.com), and Kate Ruane, American Civil Liberties Union, at [kruane@aclu.org](mailto:kruane@aclu.org), or Corrine Yu, Leadership Conference Senior Program Director, at [yu@civilrights.org](mailto:yu@civilrights.org).

Sincerely,

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights  
ORGANIZATIONS

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<sup>i</sup> Thirty-eight million people are eligible for Lifeline. Universal Service Administrative Company, Program Data, Lifeline Participation, <https://www.usac.org/lifeline/learn/program-data/>. Secretary Mnuchin predicted as many as 32 million people in the U.S. could be unemployed if Congress failed to respond to the coronavirus pandemic. Chris Cillizza, *What a 20% unemployment rate would actually mean*, CNN (March 18, 2020).