

February 10, 2021

The Hon. Frank Pallone
Chair
House Energy and Commerce Committee
1309 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Hon. Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Ranking Member
House Energy and Commerce Committee
2141 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515



RE: Broadband Funding in the Stimulus Package

Dear Chair Pallone and Ranking Member McMorris Rodgers:

National Political
Advocacy Department
915 15th St. NW, 6th FL
Washington, D.C. 20005
aclu.org

Deborah N. Archer
President

Anthony Romero
Executive Director

Ronald Newman
National Political
Director

The American Civil Liberties Union, on behalf of its more than eight million members, supporters, and activists, writes to thank you for planning to include over 7 billion dollars in funding for an emergency connectivity fund that will help elementary and secondary students afford internet access service and connected devices in the next pandemic relief package. This funding is a meaningful and substantial step towards addressing the yawning gap between children who have internet access at home and computers to connect, and those who do not. This gap is more pronounced for Black, Hispanic, and lower income households and we are pleased that Congress plans to provide funds that will help these children attend school, connect with their teachers and classmates, and complete their schoolwork.¹

But Congress must do more to close the digital divide for all people. We are very grateful that Congress took the incredible and historic step of creating the Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) program in December of 2020. That program will help all low-income families, including those with children, obtain the connectivity they need to be able to sign up for vaccine appointments, search for work, work from home, attend school, and so many other necessary activities of life. Unfortunately, given the size of the need for this benefit, the funding set aside for the EBB could run out in three to six months. For that reason, in

¹ Brooke Auxier and Monica Anderson, *As schools close due to the coronavirus, some U.S. students face a digital homework gap*, FACTTANK PEW RESEARCH CNTR. (Mar. 16, 2020), <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/03/16/as-schools-close-due-to-the-coronavirus-some-u-s-students-face-a-digital-homework-gap/>.

addition to continuing to fund the proposed Emergency Connectivity Fund, and at the earliest possible opportunity, Congress also should allocate additional funds to the EBB sufficient to last until a bridge can be built to keep all families connected even after the program ends.

Thank you again for creating the EBB and for including this additional funding that will help elementary and secondary students to access broadband and connected devices. We look forward to working with Congress to close the digital divide once and for all. Please reach out to Kate Ruane, kruane@aclu.org if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Ronald Newman
National Political Director



Kate Ruane
Senior Legislative Counsel

CC:
Speaker Nancy Pelosi
Majority Leader Steny Hoyer
Majority Whip Jim Clyburn