

For Immediate Release

Contact: Brittany-Rae Gregory
brittany-rae@nextcenturycities.org
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**NEXT CENTURY CITIES ISSUES STATEMENT ON PASSAGE
OF CONGRESSIONAL COVID-19 RELIEF BILL**

Washington, D.C. (December 22, 2020) – On December 21, 2020, U.S. Congress passed the [Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021](#). The \$900 billion package includes \$7 billion in support for broadband. Local broadband expansion efforts may get a boost from the following earmarks:

- \$3.2 billion in emergency funds for low-income broadband access;
- \$1 billion tribal broadband fund;
- \$250 million dollars in support for telehealth programs;
- \$65 million to complete accurate broadband mapping of communities that remain unserved and underserved; and
- \$300 million in funding for a new rural broadband grant program.

Ryan Johnston, Policy Counsel, Federal Programs, at Next Century Cities stated:

"The pandemic has made internet access a necessity, and the new COVID-19 relief package takes an important step forward by including emergency funding for low-income families to obtain broadband connections. \$50 per month in support will make a significant difference in households who have had to prioritize other expenses over a broadband subscription despite few alternatives to get online. It is also heartening to see Congress acknowledge that affordability is a primary barrier to broadband adoption.

"However, this is a stopgap solution passed at the eleventh hour that leaves much to be desired for long-term broadband access and adoption strategies. Congress plays a pivotal role in creating the policies that can bring people online. There is more work to do to ensure that every resident is able to get and stay connected."

Corian Zacher, Policy Counsel for State & Local Initiatives, at Next Century Cities stated:

"Now that many people are facing unemployment and eviction as a result of the pandemic, the need for ubiquitous affordable broadband access has only become more essential. A \$50 subsidy will bring digital citizenship within reach for many families who cannot afford it, ensuring they are not faced with the difficult decision of whether to purchase internet for distance learning and telehealth or put food on the table for their families.

“COVID-19’s impact on increased internet reliance will not end just because the pandemic loosens its grip. Increased reliance on online services for basic daily tasks will continue to be the new normal. The provisions included in the relief bill, in particular funding for deployment on Tribal lands, mapping improvements, and Historically Black Colleges and Universities, are important first steps to ensuring that no person in the United States lacks the connectivity they need for living and participating in a digital society.”

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