Next Century Cities Laments The End Of The Affordable Connectivity Program And Urges Congress To Quickly Reinstate This Critical Program.

Washington, D.C. (May 31, 2024) - Today marks the last day of the affordable connectivity program.

The lapse of the ACP represents the loss of over $16.2 billion in annual benefits to households, but also represents the loss of a significant amount of trust between the federal government and the municipalities and community based organizations that have spent countless hours enrolling, supporting, and advertising the ACP. Now, those same communities and organizations are faced with the daunting task of centralizing and directing millions of ACP subscribers to other resources that may not meet their needs or may not exist at all.

Similarly, each state and the National Telecommunications and Information Administration must determine if already accepted state Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Program proposals are in need of clarifying edits as many states cited the ACP as a key pillar of their digital equity plans.

Next Century Cities urges Congress to act quickly to reinstate the ACP and reconnect the millions of households that have inevitably been disconnected. Allowing the program to falter will only further erode the trust between enrollees and the agencies and nonprofit organizations that worked tirelessly to promote the program. This ensures that thousands, if not millions, of ACP enrollees dropped from the program and will likely not reapply if it is refunded.

Andy Stutzman, Executive Director at Next Century Cities, offered the following remarks:

“The ACP is one of the most successful programs ever in connecting households to affordable high speed Internet. However, if it is not refunded, it may be viewed as a program where billions of dollars were spent with a lack of foresight and will to plan for a long term funding solution.

“Without the ACP, State broadband offices are left to develop disparate affordable solutions of their own as required by BEAD. This has the potential to create additional confusion and mistrust among households and could distract States from focusing on other BEAD priorities; leading to delays in implementation.

Congress must pass a bipartisan solution to fund the ACP immediately before trust is broken with millions of households across the country.”
Ryan Johnston, Senior Policy Counsel for Federal Programs, added:

“Over twenty-two million people utilized the ACP to keep themselves connected. Now, those same households are faced with the impossible task of choosing between broadband services and other household necessities.

“Congress’ failure to act to refund the program before its lapse all but guarantees that some of those who are disenrolled from the program will not return. Not because of any programmatic changes in the future but because the trust between households and the FCC has once again been significantly damaged. For all the good the ACP has done and can do in the future, this lapse in the program will undoubtedly tarnish its name and prevent the same level of effectiveness in the future.

“Congress must act as quickly as possible to refund the ACP and minimize the harm consumers nationwide will experience as a result of the ACP’s end.”

Corian Zacher, Senior Policy Counsel for State and Local Affairs, also added:

“The most recent American Community Survey estimates that around 40 million residents lack a home broadband subscription. That number strongly correlates with the number of residents living below the federal poverty line.

“In 2024, a home broadband connection is as important as water and electricity. Without sustainable funding for the program, families across the country will be forced to choose whether to cancel their broadband subscription or buy groceries. Immediate congressional support is vital to refund the ACP swiftly and effectively, minimizing the economic burden on already vulnerable households.”

Stacey Baxter, Program Manager, included:

“When over 22 million Americans enrolled in the ACP it meant that for many Americans, they were able to access the internet at home for the very first time. Millions of students could study at home for the first time; teens in rural communities were able to access critical mental health support via telehealth from their homes; working parents were able to take online classes at home. The ACP provided needed support and infinite resources to so many, that now, unfortunately, will lose out on those opportunities just as quickly as they became available.

“Americans deserve affordable high-quality access to the Internet. The ACP made that possible. While we figure out long-term solutions to closing the digital divide, let’s not create unnecessary gaps in access. Fund the ACP.”