

For Immediate Release

Contact: Lukas Pietrzak
Email: info@nextcenturycities.org
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NEXT CENTURY CITIES FILES REPLY COMMENTS REITERATING THE IMPORTANCE OF ROBUST COMPETITION IN THE EMERGENCY BROADBAND BENEFIT PROGRAM AND NEED FOR THE FCC TO COLLABORATE WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENTS TO BUILD PUBLIC AWARENESS

Washington, D.C. (February 16, 2021) – Today, Next Century Cities (“NCC”) submitted [reply comments](#) in response to the Federal Communications Commission’s (“FCC” or “Commission”) request for public input on administering the Emergency Broadband Benefit (“EBB”), a program that will help low-income households maintain broadband Internet services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Local officials and community leaders should sign-up to be outreach partners and receive program updates [here](#).

Francella Ochillo, Next Century Cities’ Executive Director, elevated the importance of collaboration with local officials and community-level partners in the [FCC’s Emergency Broadband Roundtable](#) on February 12th. She adds the following:

“For years, federal broadband programs have almost exclusively focused on deployment, leaving local and state governments to fill in adoption gaps. Local insights, particularly from community leaders who have had to develop connectivity solutions for residents long before and throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, are critical for ensuring overall program effectiveness.

“NCC member municipalities care deeply about connecting low-income residents with reliable and affordable broadband. Mayor Satya-Rhodes Conway of [Madison, Wisconsin](#), called on the FCC to work directly with local governments to ensure that the EBB reaches as many eligible households as possible. Reiterating the need for clear direction from the FCC, community leaders in [Baltimore, Maryland](#), urged the Commission to host town hall meetings for community anchor institutions, civic leaders, and local and state officials to learn about ways to promote participation in the program.

“Joint comments from [Seattle, Washington](#), Washington State Broadband Office, the Seattle Public Schools District, and the Seattle Housing Authority demonstrate the importance of partnerships with community-based digital inclusion and social service organizations at the local, county, and state level. The FCC’s collaborations with these entities will determine whether notice of the EBB program reaches households that face persistent challenges in learning about, subscribing to, and maintaining affordable broadband services.

“Mayor Libby Schaaf of [Oakland, California](#), highlighted the need for students to have access to reliable broadband speeds that can support video conferencing required for remote learning. The City of Oakland stated that service below 25 Mbps download speed/10 Mbps upload should not be eligible for reimbursement. Similarly, the City of [Austin, Texas](#), encouraged the FCC to ensure that EBB program speeds are consistent with those offered to market-rate customers.

“Even though the FCC has been slow to embrace municipal networks as a strategic partner in achieving universal broadband availability, [Longmont, Colorado](#), is a great example of a municipal broadband servicer that could provide affordable, high-speed options for EBB program participants equivalent to market-rate subscribers. CIO Linda Gurell of [San Francisco, California](#), explained the importance of having a wide array of providers in the EBB program, noting that not traditional models (such as smaller regional internet service providers and municipal networks) have the flexibility to respond to local conditions in ways that challenge national providers.

“Countless local and state officials who did not have the information or capacity to comment in this proceeding will nonetheless be critical program partners in the EBB public education campaign. NCC strongly urges the FCC to tap into their wisdom as local and state officials already have relationships and direct lines of communications with the residents that EBB is intended to support.”

Review NCC’s February 16th reply comments [here](#). Our ex partes with the Offices of Acting Chairwoman [Jessica Rosenworcel](#) and Commissioners [Brendan Carr](#), [Geoffrey Starks](#), and [Nathan Simington](#) expand on specific program recommendations.

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