

**Written Statement of  
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**“The National Broadband Plan: Promoting Broadband Adoption”**

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Subcommittee on Communications, Technology, and the Internet  
United States House of Representatives  
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Chairman Boucher, Ranking Member Stearns, Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today about recommendations in the National Broadband Plan aimed at promoting broadband adoption and utilization.

Through the Recovery Act, Congress called on the FCC to develop a broadband plan that would “ensure that all people of the United States have access to broadband capability and establish benchmarks for meeting that goal. . . include a detailed strategy for achieving affordability of such service and maximum utilization of broadband infrastructure and service by the public . . . and include a plan for the use of broadband infrastructure and services in advancing consumer welfare, civic participation, public safety and homeland security, community development, health care delivery, energy independence and efficiency, education, worker training, private sector investment, entrepreneurial activity, job creation and economic growth, and other national purposes.”

In response to the congressional mandate, the National Broadband Plan includes a goal that every American should have affordable access to robust broadband service, and the means and skills to subscribe if they choose. The Plan outlines a pathway to increase home broadband adoption rates from 65% today to higher than 90% by 2020 and to narrow significantly differences among demographic groups. This is an important and ambitious goal -- for instance,

it took 30 years to get from roughly 60% to 90% adoption for telephone. We are proposing to cover just as much ground in a third of the time.

The Plan sets forth a number of recommendations for how to achieve this goal, guided by several overarching principles. First, we must focus on increasing broadband adoption in the home. Public access, while essential, is not a substitute for home access, and the nation will not realize the full benefits of broadband unless public policies focus on increasing adoption in the home. Second, adoption alone is not the end game. Getting people online is the critical first step, but ultimately the value of broadband to an individual depends on how fully it is utilized. And finally, adoption programs and policies should be targeted, local, measurable, able to evolve as technology evolves, and collaborative.

Targeted solutions address specific barriers to adoption and direct resources at populations less likely to be online. While the Plan refers to the three main categories of barriers – cost, digital literacy and relevance – it is important to note that each category encompasses several discrete barriers. For example, “cost” may refer to the cost of monthly service, the cost of hardware (such as a computer or mobile phone), or other barriers associated with an individual’s inability to enter into a long-term contract. To address the cost barrier, the Plan recommends expanding the FCC’s existing low income Universal Service program, known as Lifeline and Link Up, to support broadband. To address digital literacy barriers, the Plan calls for a three-part National Digital Literacy Program, which would include: creation of a Digital Literacy Corps, increasing the capacity of libraries and community centers to provide public access points, and creation of an Online Skills portal for free basic digital skills training. And, to address relevance, the Plan recommends partnerships between the public, private, non-profit and philanthropic sectors, which can help provide comprehensive solutions that combine

hardware, service, training and content, and by conducting outreach and awareness campaigns that target underserved communities.

People with disabilities face the same barriers to adoption and utilization as the rest of the population, but also face additional impediments. For example, devices often are not designed to be accessible for people with disabilities, assistive technologies like Braille displays are expensive, Internet-based video programming often does not have captions or video descriptions offering an account of what is on the screen, and some services, including emergency services, are not directly accessible. To address the unique difficulties faced by people with disabilities, the Plan recommends that the Executive branch convene a Broadband Accessibility Working Group to coordinate federal efforts to maximize accessibility. The Plan also recommends that to make government a model for accessibility, the FCC should establish an Accessibility and Innovation Forum, and that Congress, the FCC and the Department of Justice should modernize accessibility laws and rules to ensure that services, equipment and content are accessible and affordable for people with disabilities.

American Indian Tribes and Alaska Native Villages face significant barriers to adoption. Given the unique sovereign status of Tribal Nations and the disparity in existing infrastructure and available data, the Plan makes additional recommendations to increase broadband adoption, as well as broadband deployment, on Tribal lands. The Plan also recognizes the similar needs of Native Hawaiian Homelands. The Plan emphasizes the need to improve coordination and consultation between Tribes and federal government through a series of recommendations, including the formation of a FCC-Native Nations Broadband Task Force, the creation of an FCC Office of Native American Affairs, and the establishment of a Tribal seat on the USAC Board of Directors and on the Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service. The Plan also includes

other recommendations, such as improving the quality of data relating to broadband on Tribal lands and technical training for Tribes.

Local solutions are essential because Tribal, state and local governments can and should develop and implement specific programs to meet their unique needs and promote connectivity across entire communities. The decision to subscribe to broadband service is an individual one, but the path to full adoption and utilization is social. It unfolds in homes, libraries, schools and community organizations in neighborhoods around the country.

Public access sites are essential to building the social infrastructure needed to promote adoption and utilization in the home. Local solutions that promote community connectivity also help promote a culture of use that can help make broadband more relevant to a community and give people an opportunity to learn an unfamiliar technology, in the right environment and with the content, technology and teachers that can bring it all together ***for them***. To encourage state and local action, the Plan recommends continuing federal support for state and local broadband initiatives, as envisioned by Section 106 of the Broadband Data Improvement Act. This support will allow state and local governments to develop more targeted plans to address the unique barriers their citizens face. The Plan suggests this funding come from existing appropriations, but should additional appropriations be made available, the Plan also recommends expanding eligibility to ensure that Tribal Nations are eligible to apply for grants.

To ensure sustainable adoption, program outcomes and policies should constantly be measured and evolve as technology evolves. Success cannot be determined without investing in on-going, effective measurement and evaluation from the beginning. Unfortunately, despite more than a decade of efforts focused on bridging the digital divide, data on what works best to stimulate adoption and utilization are scarce. The Plan suggests that future federal appropriations

for broadband adoption include specific requirements and funding for third-party evaluations and assessment. Each grant should include funding for program evaluation, with additional funding to conduct in-depth assessments and longitudinal program assessment.

The federal government clearly has a role to play in promoting broadband adoption, but federal efforts alone are not enough, which is why the Plan's recommendations build around the principle of collaboration. To catalyze additional collaboration and knowledge sharing, the Plan recommends the establishment of a National Best Practices Clearinghouse. A National Best Practices Clearinghouse would help all stakeholders take advantage of the current momentum in this area to learn from current investments and from each other to inform future policy and programmatic decisions.

The FCC has already started implementing those recommendations within its jurisdiction. Just last week, the FCC adopted an order asking the Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service to review and prepare recommendations regarding the Commission's eligibility, verification and outreach rules for the Lifeline and Link-Up programs. We also plan to host a roundtable discussion to discuss potential pilot programs to identify the most efficient and effective long-term broadband support mechanism for low-income Americans.

Many significant adoption recommendations are outside the jurisdiction of the FCC, however, and will require action by Congress, executive branch agencies, state and local governments, and other non-governmental stakeholders. I, and others at the FCC, look forward to providing additional assistance where we can be helpful.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify this morning.