

THE NEW ENGLAND COUNCIL

January 25, 2024

New England Congressional Delegation

Dear New England Delegation:

On behalf of the New England Council, I write today to urge you to prioritize renewing funding for the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) before it is estimated to run out in April 2024. As you know, The New England Council is a non-partisan alliance of businesses, academic and health institutions, and public and private organizations throughout New England formed to promote economic growth and a high quality of life in the New England region. Access to affordable and reliable internet service opens a wide array of benefits to our residents, from opportunities for remote work and learning, to access to top-notch medical care through telehealth, and more. As such, we believe the ACP program is vital to our region's continued growth and prosperity.

By way of background, on December 31, 2021, to comply with the Congressional directives in the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, the Federal Communications Commission launched the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), a \$14.2 billion successor program to the Emergency Broadband Benefit, which enabled nearly 9 million Americans to afford home broadband during the pandemic. This was a well-timed and much needed affordability solution as nationwide, two-thirds of the entire digital divide is due to affordability.

Over 22 million Americans, including **more than 786,000 households across New England**, currently rely on the ACP for affordable internet service. If Congress does not prioritize extending funding for the ACP this year your constituents will see an increase in their internet bill and may face losing internet service altogether. This would occur just as states prepare to make the biggest broadband investment in history.

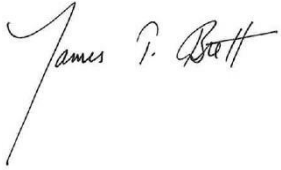
Unfortunately, we are approaching an alarming crossroads: funding for the ACP is projected to run out as soon as April 2024. So far, no clear path has emerged to renew the funds. Even before funding runs out, Internet service providers (ISP) will need to start notifying customers of the future rate increase, which can create confusion and lower consumer confidence.

Separate from the ACP, the Broadband Equity Access and Deployment (BEAD) Program relies on individuals being able to afford broadband access in order to incentivize the construction of high-speed broadband infrastructure in currently underserved areas. States are structuring these BEAD grant awards and ISPs are working through calculations on whether infrastructure build-outs are profitable in rural areas. By allowing ACP to lapse, ISPs will inevitably rethink their calculations and may change or scrap construction plans all together. Without ACP, the BEAD program cannot fully accomplish its mission.

The ACP remains a vital 21st century program for connecting people to sustainable broadband connections for school, work, and life. We urge you to prioritize ACP bridge funding in early 2024 to ensure this important program does not end. If you or your staff have any questions, please feel free to contact Mariah Healy, Director of Federal Affairs, at mhealy@newenglandcouncil.com. Thank you in advance for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,

THE
NEW ENGLAND
COUNCIL



James T. Brett
President & CEO