REGIONAL LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

Leader Hakeem Jeffries —— Chair Steny H. Hoyer

The Affordable Connectivity Program Is Enhancing Access to Broadband in Hawaii's 1st District

Executive Summary

In America today, one in four households are not connected to the internet, which has a negative impact on the growing number of Americans who rely on this critical utility. In an effort to address this gap, Congress created the Emergency Broadband Benefit to provide assistance with the cost of internet service for low-income households during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) expanded this program with the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), which provides assistance of up to $30 a month for low-income households, and up to $75 a month for households on qualifying rural and tribal lands.

In **Hawaii's 1st District**, the savings provided through ARP and BIL have had a significant impact. As of January 2024, the ACP has provided benefits to **26,000** households, reducing broadband costs in the district by roughly **$11,830,000** annually. An additional estimated **45,000** households are eligible through the ACP but have not yet enrolled. Approximately **40.5%** of households in the district live in an area where an internet service provider is offering a no-cost plan to ACP participants.

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law also provided critical investments to deliver broadband infrastructure. For example, the BIL created the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Program (BEAD), which is investing $42 billion into internet adoption programs, infrastructure building, and state and territorial planning across America.

Background

According to the Federal Communications Commission, more than 24 million Americans lack access to broadband internet.[1] Americans living in rural communities were 16 percentage points less likely to have access to broadband than Americans

[1] Federal Communications Commission, *Fourteenth Broadband Deployment Report* (January 19, 2021). https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/FCC-21-18A1.pdf

living in urban areas.[2] This lack of access to broadband is worse among low-income Americans. According to a 2019 Pew Research Center survey, 44% of households earning less than $30,000 a year do not have access to broadband internet.[3] Overall, approximately one in four U.S. households are not connected to the internet.[4]

In response to this reality, particularly when society quickly moved online during the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress created the Emergency Broadband Benefit in the 2021 Consolidated Appropriations Act, which provided qualifying low-income Americans with free or discounted broadband access.[5] The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) expanded this benefit through the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP).

The ACP provides assistance of up to $30 a month for low-income households, and up to $75 a month for households living on qualifying tribal lands. Enrolled households can also take advantage of a one-time $100 discount on laptops or other devices from a participating internet provider if they are able to contribute between $10 and $50 toward the cost.[6] The ACP is available to households earning less than 200% of the federal poverty level (FPL), and households can also automatically qualify through participation in programs like SNAP, Medicaid, the Free and Reduced-Price School Lunch Program, housing assistance, or a Pell Grant.[7]

Furthermore, the White House secured commitments from 20 of the largest internet service providers in the country, including Verizon, Comcast, and AT&T, to offer high-speed broadband plans at no additional cost to households participating in the ACP.[8] By enrolling in a plan that costs less than $30 per month, these customers can receive free internet service.

Expanding digital access and broadband has significant benefits for both families and communities. As of January 2024, more than 22.5 million households have enrolled in the ACP, claiming more than $1.8 billion of assistance with their internet or mobile phone bills through the ACP.[9]

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[2] Federal Communications Commission, *Fourteenth Broadband Deployment Report* (January 19, 2021). https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/FCC-21-18A1.pdf
[3] Pew Charitable Trusts, *America's Digital Divide* (July 26, 2019). https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/trust/archive/summer-2019/americas-digital-divide
[4] Federal Communications Commission, *Fourteenth Broadband Deployment Report* (January 19, 2021) (https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/FCC-21-18A1.pdf).
[5] Congressional Research Service, *The Emergency Broadband Benefit: Implementation and Future Policy Directions* (February 23, 2021) (https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IN/IN11612).
[6] Federal Communications Commission, *Affordable Connectivity Program* (March 15, 2023). https://web.archive.org/web/20230412100516/https://www.fcc.gov/acp
[7] Note that some of these programs, such as Pell Grants, have eligibility thresholds higher than 200% FPL. For the purposes of this report, 200% FPL was used to determine eligibility of households by congressional district. Federal Communications Commission, *Affordable Connectivity Program* (March 15, 2023). https://web.archive.org/web/20230412100516/https://www.fcc.gov/acp
[8] White House, *Fact Sheet: President Biden and Vice President Harris Reduce High-Speed Internet Costs for Millions of Americans* (May 9, 2022). https://web.archive.org/web/20230330103757/https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/05/09/fact-sheet-president-biden-and-vice-president-harris-reduce-high-speed-internet-costs-for-millions-of-americans/
[9] Universal Service Administrative Co., *ACP Enrollment and Claims Tracker* (accessed July 10, 2023). https://web.archive.org/web/20230710221742/https://www.usac.org/about/affordable-connectivity-program/acp-enrollment-and-claims-tracker/

This investment in American broadband has enabled American families to gain the tools they need to access jobs, education, health care services, and much more.[10] A recent survey of ACP enrollees revealed how the program provides access to critical services:

- 72% of enrollees have used their ACP internet service to schedule or attend healthcare appointments
- 48% have used it for applying to jobs and teleworking
- 75% of those aged 18-24 used it for schoolwork
- 68% of all enrollees reported that they did not have reliable internet access before joining the ACP
- 80% of these enrollees have cited high costs as the primary reason for not having consistent internet service.[11]

The Benefits of the Affordable Connectivity Program in HI-01

Many households in **Hawaii's 1st District** have lowered internet costs through the ACP. **26,000** households in the district were enrolled in the ACP as of the beginning of 2024. If each of these households receives a benefit of $30 per month, the savings for the district would total **$11,830,000** each year. **40.5%** of households in the district are served by at least one internet service provider offering a no-cost plan to participating households.

The program also has great potential in this district. An additional **45,000** households are estimated to be eligible for this benefit but have not yet subscribed.[12]

Additional Investments in Broadband Access and Infrastructure

In addition to the ACP, BIL delivers $42 billion in federal funding for broadband infrastructure building, state and territorial planning, and internet adoption programs through the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Program (BEAD).[13] In 2022, all eligible states and territories applied for and received planning grants that support their development of a five-year action plan.[14]

The BEAD program will allocate money to states and territories based in part on the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) National Broadband Map, which tracks

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[10] Brookings Institution, *Digital Prosperity: How Broadband Can Deliver Health and Equity to All Communities* (February 27, 2020).(https://www.brookings.edu/research/digital-prosperity-how-broadband-can-deliver-health-and-equity-to-all-communities/).
[11] Federal Communications Commission, *ACP Consumer Survey* (February 29, 2024) (https://www.fcc.gov/acp-survey).
[12] Detailed information about eligibility and enrollment by ZIP code can be found using the Benton Institute for Broadband and Society's Affordable Connectivity Program Enrollment Performance Tool, found at https://www.benton.org/acp_tool.
[13] National Telecommunications and Information Administration, *Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Program* (accessed July 10, 2023). https://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/funding-programs/broadband-equity-access-and-deployment-bead-program-0
[14] National Telecommunications and Information Administration, *Biden-Harris Administration's Internet for All Initiative Moves Forward with 100% Participation in Planning Grants* (August 17, 2022). https://web.archive.org/web/20221202065018/https://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/news/latest-news/biden-harris-administrations-internet-all-initiative-moves-forward-100

the availability of high-speed internet based on location.[15] The recently updated map helps identify underserved communities most in need of funding for high-speed internet infrastructure investments.[16] On June 26, 2023, the Biden Administration announced the BEAD funding allocations to states and territories, and these funds will begin expanding internet access for workers, families, and communities this year.[17]

Conclusion

Internet access has become an essential utility in the 21st century, and the Affordable Connectivity Program is providing millions of U.S. households with access to this critical utility, including **26,000** households in **Hawaii's 1st District District** so far. This program is critical to ensuring that Americans can reliably access the high-speed internet they need in order to participate fully in America's increasingly digital society.

This report was last updated on August 16, 2024[18]

[15] Federal Communications Commission, *FCC National Broadband Map*. https://broadbandmap.fcc.gov/home
[16] National Association of Counties, *Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Updates National Broadband Map to Reflect Resolved Challenges* (June 9, 2023). https://www.naco.org/blog/federal-communications-commission-fcc-updates-national-broadband-map-reflect-resolved.
[17] National Telecommunications and Information Administration, *Biden-Harris Announces State Allocations for $42.45 Billion High-Speed Internet Grant Program as Part of Investing in America Agenda* (June 26, 2023). https://www.ntia.doc.gov/press-release/2023/biden-harris-administration-announces-state-allocations-4245-billion-high-speed
[18] "Regional Leadership Council, *"Methodology For Regional Leadership Council Briefings"* (August, 2024). (https://rlc.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/regionalleadershipcouncil.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/RLC%20Methodology%20-%20UPDATED%20August%202024.pdf).