



December 8, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
1236 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
2468 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

To Members of the 116th Congress:

New America's Open Technology Institute strongly urges Congress to immediately tackle the crisis of internet affordability. Millions of Americans are suffering through the COVID-19 pandemic without access to the internet—or the means to afford it. We recently published *The Cost of Connectivity 2020*, a study of 760 internet plans in 28 cities across Europe, Asia, and North America, and found that **U.S. consumers pay higher costs for slower speeds than consumers abroad**. Moreover, we published two case studies, *The Cost of Connectivity in West Virginia* and *The Cost of Connectivity in the Navajo Nation*, that demonstrate internet service is particularly unaffordable in rural and Tribal communities.

The collective takeaway from this research, which was conducted *before* the onset of the pandemic, is clear: **the United States is in the grips of an internet affordability crisis**. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this crisis as more people struggle to pay for basic necessities amid widespread job and income losses.

Accordingly, **it is imperative that Congress address the high cost of internet service in any forthcoming emergency relief legislation**. Examples of legislative language can be found in H.R. 2 and H.R. 6800, both of which passed the House earlier this year. Among other things, these bills would: (1) bar internet, water, and electricity providers from shutting off service during the pandemic, (2) strengthen the Lifeline program, and (3) establish an emergency broadband benefit to subsidize the cost of internet service for low-income households, the newly unemployed, K-12 students who qualify for the National School Lunch program, and college students who receive Pell Grants. All of these measures would make internet service more affordable.

It is important to note that, of the many broadband proposals that Congress is considering, **these affordability measures are the best positioned to provide fast, emergency relief during the pandemic.** We also support Congressional action to deploy broadband in unserved areas, but such deployment can take years and is unlikely to help anyone connect to the internet before the pandemic ends. Affordability subsidies can help people now as they struggle to get through this pandemic.

Sincerely,

/s/

Joshua Stager
Senior Counsel
New America's Open Technology Institute
740 15th Street NW, Suite 900
Washington, DC 20005

Attachments: *The Cost of Connectivity 2020*
The Cost of Connectivity in West Virginia
The Cost of Connectivity in the Navajo Nation