

Support Broadband Access for All Communities

Congress can work with cities to build locally driven broadband solutions from the ground up.

Too many American households and businesses remain cut off from reliable internet access, either because of a lack of infrastructure or because of outdated, inequitably distributed, or unaffordable options. Local governments have led the way throughout the pandemic in measuring access gaps in their communities and seeking emergency solutions, such as mobile hotspots and public wi-fi access points in parks. However, more work needs to be done to address the root causes behind the digital divide.

As we recover and rebuild, Congress must invest in sustainable, locally led solutions to close the digital divide in rural, suburban, and urban communities. Broadband access is not a rural-only problem – more people without broadband at home living urban and suburban areas than in rural ones. Congress should empower community leaders to drive broadband solutions by removing legal barriers to local leadership, investing in sustainable long-term funding for broadband infrastructure, affordability programs, and local digital inclusion work, and accurately measuring broadband access and availability.

PRIORITIES

- Support **funding and financing** for public and private broadband infrastructure through Federal Communications Commission, National Telecommunications and Information Administration and U.S. Department of Agriculture broadband programs, as well as a new Broadband Infrastructure and Finance Innovation Program.
- Roll back **federal and state limitations** on local broadband leadership, including state limits on community broadband networks, and federal limits on cable franchise agreements and restrictions on local management of wireless infrastructure on municipal property.
- Support **funding for digital inclusion grants** to allow states, local governments, and nonprofits to provide assistance in applying for subsidized connections, technical skills training, and access to free or low-cost computers.
- Fund and make permanent a **broadband subsidy for low-income households**, similar to the Emergency Broadband Benefit created in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Increase **flexibility in the E-Rate program**, to allow anchor institutions like schools, libraries, and community centers to serve as connectivity springboards for their surrounding communities.
- Modernize **broadband measurement and data collection** systems by directing the Federal Communications Commission to not only collect more geographically precise information about broadband access and infrastructure, but also to collect and make publicly available information about broadband subscription costs, network performance, and reliability.

LEGISLATION NLC SUPPORTS

- **The Accessible, Affordable Broadband for All Act (H.R. 1783 /S. 745)** – Legislation to invest in broadband infrastructure, establish a new broadband infrastructure financing program, enable municipal broadband, fund E-Rate and Emergency Broadband Benefit programs, establish a new block-grant and competitive grant digital equity fund, and direct FCC policy on broadband data and network resilience
- **The Community Broadband Act (H.R. 1631)** – Legislation that would enable municipally-owned or operated broadband networks throughout the country by removing state legal barriers to local investment in broadband infrastructure.
- **Broadband Provisions within the LIFT America Act (H.R. 1848)** – Wide-ranging infrastructure package; broadband provisions would fund broadband infrastructure, establish a new broadband infrastructure financing program, enable municipal broadband, fund E-Rate and Emergency Broadband Benefit programs, establish a new block-grant and competitive grant digital equity fund, direct FCC policy on broadband data and network resilience, and provide resources for Next Generation 9-1-1.

LOCAL LEADERS IN THEIR OWN WORDS

- **Mayor Erin Mendenhall, Salt Lake City, Utah**, on the city's work to connect residents virtually:

"City practices, from permitting to boards and commissions, and even hearings at the justice court, were all shifted online to give city residents the ability to interact with us safely, and our team went to work building out more access to free public WIFI, which helped our city to bridge the digital divide further than ever before."

- **Mayor Sam Teresi, Jamestown, New York**, on investing in municipal broadband:

"Now, more than ever, we must investigate and invest in municipal broadband for our community. A low cost, high speed option that could provide a free lifeline connection to those in need, and a lower cost option to residents and businesses. I am excited to announce the formation of a Municipal Broadband Taskforce to look into seeing if the City can develop a municipal broadband program through the BPU."

- **Mayor Brandon Scott, Baltimore, Maryland**, on digital equity:

"And I am proud to announce that Baltimore is one of the first cities in the nation to officially appoint a Director of Broadband and Digital Equity. This role will focus on how to expand high-speed, affordable internet access to over 60,000 Baltimore households that are currently without this critical necessity. We will close the digital divide."