



**“Connecting America: Broadband Solutions to Pandemic Problems”
Energy & Commerce Communications & Technology Subcommittee Hearing**

Wednesday, February 17, 2021 | 11:00 AM ET | Virtual Hearing via Cisco WebEx

Key Take-Aways:

- The Emergency Broadband Benefit Program is a program that provides qualifying consumers with a \$50 monthly credit on their broadband bill. It also offers \$75 for families on tribal lands.
- Many people do not know about this program and the benefits that are available to them. And those that do know about it often encounter barriers that prevent them from enrolling.
- Congress has given over \$500 million to the FCC program last year. More oversight is needed to ensure the funding is properly being used.
- More federal investment is required to fully build out “the last mile” of broadband infrastructure.

Witnesses:

Dr. Tiffany Anderson, Superintendent, Topeka Public Schools [Testimony](#)

Mr. Johnathan Adelstein, President and CEO, Wireless Infrastructure Association [Testimony](#)

Mr. Christopher M. Shelton, President, Communications Workers of America [Testimony](#)

Mr. Matthew F. Wood, Vice President of Policy and General Counsel, Free Press Action [Testimony](#)

Subcommittee Members:

Chairman Michael Doyle (D-PA)

Democrats

Jerry McNerney (D-CA)
Yvette Clarke (D-NY)
Marc Veasey (D-TX)
A. Donald McEachin (D-VA)
Darren Soto (D-FL)
Tom O'Halleran (D-AZ)
Kathleen Rice (D-NY)
Anna Eshoo (D-CA)
G.K. Butterfield (D-NC)
Doris Matsui (D-CA)
Peter Welch (D-VT)
Kurt Schrader (D-OR)
Tony Cardenas (D-CA)
Robin Kelly (D-IL)

Republicans

Robert Latta (R-OH)
Steve Scalise (R-LA)
Brett Guthrie (R-KY)
Adam Kinzinger (R-IL)
Gus Bilirakis (R-FL)
Bill Johnson (R-OH)
Billy Long (R-MO)
Richard Hudson (R-NC)
Markwayne Mullin (R-OK)
Tim Walberg (R-MI)
Earl Carter (R-GA)
Jeff Duncan (R-SC)
John Curtis (R-UT)
Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-WA) *ex officio*

Angie Craig (D-MN)
Lizzie Fletcher (D-TX)
Frank Pallone (D-NJ) *ex officio*

Q&A

Doyle

- Congress established the \$3.2 billion Emergency Broadband Benefit Program in December 2020. Why is this program so important and what kind of lifeline could it provide?
 - Wood: Prices have gone up since the start of the pandemic. It is crucial for more plans to offer more options for people to keep them more connected and not less.
- Are you concerned that this program could target some of the same households?
 - Wood: I'm not concerned in the long run because the new leadership at the FCC could look for ways to be more efficient and look for duplication.
- Why do you believe legislation like the [Moving Forward Act](#) will help in closing the digital divide?
 - Shelton: The only way to improve is getting the companies that know how to close the divide to get behind this. And these companies need federal money to do this. Deregulation is not accomplishing what it needed to.

Latta

- How will bills like the [Wireless Leadership Act](#) help responsibly roll back regulations and ensure our country's broadband networks can continue to handle more internet traffic?
 - Adelstein: The bill focuses on co-location which should be easy to accomplish. We need to work with existing infrastructure and also need smart policies to build out 5G and close the digital divide.
- How much money will it take to deploy 5G networks in local and rural communities?
 - Adelstein: This information is very dispersed. It is almost impossible to quantify. What can be quantified is the benefit to the economy.

Pallone

- Why are data caps problematic?
 - Shelton: The pandemic has forced families to use far more data than they would normally use. Data caps exacerbate an already horrible situation by forcing families to pay even more.
- What are some of the principles that we should look to for a more long-term solution?
 - Wood: Better data is crucial in understanding what needs to be addressed. There also needs to be more funding and it needs to be more sustainable.

McNerney

- Why is it important to minimize burden of eligibility for enrollment in programs that assist with paying for utilities?

- Wood: Anything to lower barriers and increase outreach will make the program a success.
- Lack of transparency from providers about offerings and pricing. What risks are posed to program success?
 - Wood: Generally, there needs to be more transparency with providers.
- How have price increases correlated with capital investments?
 - Wood: Competition is what drives down capital investments, not drive them up. We need to consider economic factors.
- Would deregulating the infrastructure lead to an increase in broadband access and affordability for families living in unserved and underserved areas?
 - Wood: Deregulation is not enough. People need to be offered lots of options, not just the cheapest service. There needs to be policies that increase competition.

Bilirakis

- I have re-introduced the [Coastal Broadband Deployment Act](#) that codifies FCC action that reduces red tape for broadband projects. Can you explain importance of codifying regulatory action from the perspective of business development and investment?
 - Adelstein: We will work with Congress on this legislation.
- Will reducing regulatory burdens quicken infrastructure development to meaningfully reduce the chances of breaches?
 - Adelstein: 5G creates great opportunity to build up cybersecurity to protect against attacks. Cybersecurity professionals also need to be trained in 5G to better increase network security.

Johnson

- How can helping providers quickly upgrade the existing structure would help lower consumer prices? Is facilitating competition and consumer choice a good thing?
 - Adelstein: Competition is critical. The way to facilitate competition is to get more equipment up more quickly.
- Should Congress support the 5G workforce and fiber?
 - Adelstein: This is an opportunity for Congress to work together with the private sector.

Veasey

- What should the FCC be thinking about to make it easy for families to access emergency broadband benefit?
 - Wood: We need low barriers to applications and verification. The additional documentation can be a huge barrier. The process needs to be more centralized

and localized.

- How can we ensure high participation on the provider side?
 - Wood: By giving people the flexibility to choose any plan.

Long

- How important are the streamlining reforms to winning the technological race to 5G with China?
 - Adelstein: This is a great opportunity for bipartisan agreement.
- How important is the Lifeline regulatory approach?
 - Adelstein: The Lifeline regulatory approach led to the world's greatest expansion of broadband networks.

Rice

- How can the emergency benefit hotspot program help close the adoption gap?
 - Wood: It is really about the whole household. The program is aimed at connecting students, but students are a part of families so the whole family is affected.
- Will encouraging broad participation in the program by ISP providers will help maximize both consumer choice and increase enrollment?
 - Wood: Yes, as it offers flexibilities for more ISP providers to come in.
- What can we do to increase broadband adoption by older Americans?
 - This is a problem, and it is not getting better fast enough. Affordability, access, and digital literacy are all important factors.

O'Halloran

- Can you highlight the importance of FCC contribution methodology in a way that preserves the success of its programs in helping underserved Americans?
 - Shelton: We need to figure out ways to make sure that the Universal Service Fund is actually being applied to broadband.

Curtis

- How do we streamline the federal permitting process?
 - Adelstein: We need real federal leadership through legislation or a workgroup to get agencies together to make sure they are permitting leases in an expedited fashion.
- Do we need more collaboration with state and local partners?
 - Adelstein: Yes and we need to work with tribal communities as well.

Carter

- What are some of the top issues facing the wireless industry now when it comes to expediting buildout?
 - Adelstein: The top issue is having enough capital to buildout to the entire country. We need substantial investment to finish out.

Cardenas

- How can we make sure that the people who most desperately need help will know about the emergency broadband help that is available for them and how to access it? How do we capture the people who are not a part of the Lifeline program but are eligible for the emergency broadband benefit?
 - Wood: We need to make sure there is outreach happening in local communities and that there are advertisements in various languages. There also needs to be centralized and localized information from the FCC.
- How do we ensure residents of multi-residential homes such as dorms, nursing homes, and trailer parks know about and are eligible to receive this emergency broadband help?
 - Wood: There needs to be a focus on the household specifically, and not a focus on the single address of where a group may reside.

Duncan

- Do you think the competitive marketplace or the government should determine the price of communication services?
 - Adelstein: The private marketplace has done a fantastic job as evidenced by the cost per megabit has gone down by 98% in the last 10 years.

Kelly

- How do you think the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program should evolve to ensure customers are getting a good product and ISPs are holding up their end?
 - Wood: By giving customers a choice to apply up to the \$50 credit. Giving people the option to have a plan that costs less than that to whatever service tier they would like.
- Congress appropriated an additional \$250 million for this program in December. How can the FCC better use this new pot of money to ensure that communities of color, including native populations, benefit from the telehealth program?
 - Anderson: Accountability measures need to be put in place. Collecting data is what can help hold people accountable. Transparency is also an issue.

Butterfield

- What changes can be made by Congress to the Lifeline program to address the digital divide?
 - Shelton: The Lifeline program needs to be strengthened. What could destroy this program is if it were to not be supported/funded by annual Congressional appropriations.

