

February 16, 2022

Marlene H. Dortch
Federal Communications Commission
45 L Street, NE
Washington, DC 20554

Re: *Report on the Future of the Universal Service Fund (WC Docket No. 21-476)*

Ms. Dortch:

The pandemic has demonstrated how critical internet access is for all Americans to be able to survive and thrive. Federal support is a crucial part of bridging the digital divide by providing much needed improvements to broadband infrastructure, lowering the cost of high-quality internet, and providing opportunities for historically unserved and underserved communities to access digital services and resources.

Now, thanks to the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, the FCC has before it a historic opportunity – and the responsibility – to help ensure the benefits of online connections can be made accessible to all, especially low-income households who can benefit from tremendous opportunities and resources if they are able to gain access.

The communities that our groups are proud to represent know first-hand that high quality and reliable broadband are necessary to keep immigrant families connected to their in-language communities both in the U.S. and abroad, provide the elderly with more accessible health care, give students access to English as a Second Language homework assistance and other learning programs, and connect refugee populations to job training programs.

Broadband access and online services were essential before the pandemic, and communities expect to rely even more heavily on technology and remote solutions after the pandemic subsides. Many jobs and opportunities will remain remote and only accessible online, health services will be made more affordable and easier to schedule online, and special programming that has been developed for youth, the elderly, and others will continue to take place online.

As the FCC weighs its next steps on implementing key IJJA provisions related to broadband and – perhaps most importantly – how to reform a dated Universal Service Fund (USF) system, we urge the Commission to consider the following actions to advance digital equity and close the digital divide:

1. **Focus on affordability for low-income and unserved Americans.** Cost plays a major role in determining who can and cannot connect to the internet – not just for members of the AAPI community. Indicators such as income and English proficiency suggest that the AAPI community are struggling to access the internet. [Research](#) shows that 44 percent of adults with household incomes below \$30,000 do not have broadband. The same studies suggest that 12 out of 19 Asian origin groups have poverty

rates that were as high as the U.S. average. The FCC must think outside the box to make internet access more affordable, and therefore, more reliable, well into the future. In order to support the FCC's efforts, it is also important that the funding for internet access for low-income and unserved Americans is sustainable. Therefore, the FCC should urge Congress to annually appropriate dollars to directly fund USF.

- 2. Encourage greater broadband adoption through expanded language support for new programs.** Affordability is not the only hurdle contributing to the digital divide among the AAPI community; [38 percent](#) of Asian Americans say they speak English less than very well. For non-English speakers who struggle to pay for internet access, it can be difficult to take advantage of benefits, such as the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), that assist in paying for broadband.

We are grateful for the opportunity to submit our recommendations on how the FCC can give our diverse AAPI communities a fair shot at greater social and economic mobility and opportunity.

Kind regards,

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