July 31, 2023

The President
The Vice President
White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C 20500

Dear President Biden and Vice President Harris:

On behalf of The Asian American Tech Table (Tech Table) we write to request robust additional funding for the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP).

Nearly 20 million households across the country rely on ACP for high quality, reliable, and affordable broadband access.[1] The median cost of internet service is $74.99 per month,[2] an unsustainable amount for the 89.7 million people living 200% below the poverty line in the United States.[3] ACP offers these households a discount of up to $30 per month, or $75 per month on tribal lands, to help alleviate these costs.[4] In May 2023 alone, roughly $450 million total ACP support was claimed, empowering individuals to meaningfully participate in our economy.[5] Of enrolled households, 46% live in Republican districts and 50% live in Democratic districts, making it a bipartisan program that benefits all Americans.[6]

Now, ACP is at risk of running out of funding as early as Q2 of next year if enrollment continues to grow. Predictions by the Institute for Local Reliance forecast that ACP funding could expire by August 2024 if current enrollment levels continue. If enrollment rises to 40% of eligible households from its current 38.6%, funds are predicted to run out by June 2024.[7] Without the support of ACP, millions of Americans will be disconnected from the internet or see their bills spike to unaffordable levels. It is paramount that Congress and the White House act now to provide long-term robust funding for ACP so that millions of Americans can continue to have access to the internet and fully participate in our economy.

---

[1] `ACP Enrollment and Claims Tracker - Universal Service Administrative Company (usac.org)
[2] Fight for Fair Internet: Consumer Reports white paper on broadband pricing
[3] How Poverty in the United States Is Measured and Why It Matters | PRB
[4] ACP Factsheet
[5] ACP Enrollment and Claims Tracker - Universal Service Administrative Company (usac.org)
[6] How Successful Is the Affordable Connectivity Program? | Common Sense Media
[7] ACP Dashboard

Digital Readiness for Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islanders

While many national surveys suggest some Asian American communities are well-connected to digital tools, these studies often fail to include representative samples of the community. Much of the data masks disparities between ethnic groups and often completely excludes entire communities. When other factors such as educational achievement and household income are considered and weighted, the digital divide in Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) communities becomes more apparent:

- According to data from 2021, 3.6% of Japanese Americans have less than a high school diploma, compared with 46.8% of Burmese Americans.[8]
- The median household income of Indian Americans is $1,575,893 that of Samoan Americans and Sri Lankan Americans is $55,278 and $28,959, respectively[9].
- In 2016, 26% of Asian Americans and 37% of Pacific Islanders were enrolled in Medicaid or some other public insurance program.[10]
- In 2021, 9.4% of the AAPI community was enrolled in SNAP benefits. However, the divide between certain ethnic groups was stark: 31.4% of Taiwanese Americans were enrolled in SNAP, compared with 20.5% of Native Hawaiians, and 33.6% of Burmese Americans.[11]

Benefits of Reliable, High-Speed Broadband Access

Broadband connectivity provides AANHPI communities access to a wealth of resources and allows the elderly to access telehealth services, students can access English as a Second Language homework assistance, and refugees are able to participate in job training programs. Immigrant families rely on the Internet access to connect with their communities back home, something of heightened importance due to limited traveling ability during COVID-19. Online employment resources rival traditional professional networks and will only become more commonplace in the job market as more and more resources move online.[12] Access to these tools is critical for meaningful participation in our economy and will have innumerable lasting benefits to life outcomes.

AANHPI community members across the U.S understand how important broadband access and adoption is to fully participate in today's digital economy. Participants in a community initiative to enhance the digital literacy of AANHPI elders echo these sentiments saying that:

---

[8] https://data.census.gov/table?t=-04:-05:012:031
[9] https://data.census.gov/table?t=-04:-05:012:031
[10] https://www.advancingjustice-aajc.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/Lifeline%20Backgrounder.pdf
[11] https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?t=-04%20-%20All%20available%20detailed%20Asian%20races%3A-05%20-%20All%20available%20detailed%20Native%20Hawaiian%20and%20Other%20Pacific%20Islander%20races%3ARace%20and%20Ethnicity&tid=ACSSPP1Y2019.S0201&hidePreview=true

[12] Searching for Jobs in the Internet Era | Pew Research Center

- "This [digital literacy and workforce development] program taught me practical skills like sending emails and surfing the internet from scratch. This has made it much easier for me to stay in touch with my loved ones and conduct business operations. Also, during the program, I often practiced what I learned in class with my ten-year-old grandson, which was fun for both of us and brought us closer together. I'm so happy I had the chance to take this course."
- "This learning experience has not only taught me computer skills but also changed how I think. I now realize how computers and the internet can have a big positive impact on our everyday lives. For example, I've used the knowledge I gained to navigate with Google Maps, which has helped me avoid getting lost on the complicated roads of downtown Seattle. I've also learned to recharge my ORCA card online, which is much simpler and only takes a few clicks compared to doing it onsite."

As services and programs increasingly take place online, the need for a well-funded and permanent ACP will be critical to ensuring that underserved and unserved households across the U.S have access to reliable, high-speed internet.

Language Accessibility as a Barrier to Access and Adoption

Another dimension of getting AANHPI communities connected is cultivating digital literacy in a population where approximately 34% of individuals have Limited English Proficiency (LEP). The lack of language accessibility is a significant barrier towards accessing government services for the AANHPI community. Disaggregated data shows that LEP rates among Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders vary significantly:

- For example, 78% of Bhutanese Americans are LEP while 58% of Thai Americans have LEP as well.[13]
- The LEP rate among Pacific Islanders is 8.5%, but these numbers also vary among different ethnic groups, from 41% of Marshallese Americans to 2% of Native Hawaiians.[14]

Language access is critical to ensuring that Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, and Native Hawaiians, once connected to broadband can get the most out of their experiences online. This is especially important when it comes to accessing government services and relief programs, yet many existing programs such as ACP and Lifeline only have applications in English and Spanish. Without in-language applications and outreach materials, community members with LEP have a harder time accessing government services and may be prohibited from enrolling in a program they are eligible for unless they have additional support.

Refunding ACP is Essential to Continuing to Bridge the Digital Divide

Thanks to congressional action, the Affordable Connectivity Program has helped more than 19 million households across the U.S access affordable broadband internet.[15] The accomplishments

---

[13] Infographic: AA Limited English Proficiency (2015) - AAPI Data
[14] A Community of Contrasts: AANHPI in the South | Asian Americans Advancing Justice - AAJC
[15] https://www.usac.org/about/affordable-connectivity-program/acp-enrollment-and-claims-tracker/

of ACP demonstrate how vital broadband affordability is for marginalized communities across the country to attend school, find employment opportunities, work from home, access government services, stay connected with loved ones, and fully participate in the 21st century economy. Furthermore, the flexibility provided by Congress and the FCC regarding how providers enroll customers plays an important factor in ensuring strong program participation among some of the country's most vulnerable communities.

ACP's success proves that there is an urgent need to bridge the digital divide and make broadband more affordable to low-income communities across the U.S. Without swift action from Congress to extend ACP funding, millions of households could lose their service or see their bills spike to unaffordable levels, resulting in the biggest loss of internet connectivity. Congress should prioritize robust funding for the Affordable Connectivity Program and ensure that marginalized communities have access to reliable and affordable high-speed internet.

<p align="center">****</p>

The **Asian American Tech Table** was created to facilitate a more unified Asian American voice and presence in national tech and telecom policy debates. The Table, which is co-chaired by Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC, National Council of Asian Pacific Americans, and OCA – Asian Pacific American Advocates, convenes regularly with its members to discuss relevant policy concerns, while also engaging with industry and other stakeholders to raise the visibility of the Asian American community in tech policy and digital civil rights issues. **Members of the Asian American Tech Table include The Center for Asian Pacific American Women, Filipina Women's Network, Japanese American Citizens League, Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies, Council of Korean Americans, Asian/Pacific Islander American Chamber of Commerce and Entrepreneurship, South Asian Americans Leading Together, National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Alliance, and National Council of Asian Pacific Americans**. Together we represent the technology and telecommunications policy interests of the Asian American community.

Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC, National Council of Asian Pacific Americans (NCAPA), and OCA-National thank you for the work you have already done to make high-speed reliable internet affordable to AANHPI communities across the country and for your attention and examination of this critical issue.

For more information, please contact Emily Chi, Senior Director of Telecommunications, Technology, and Media at Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC at echi@advancingjustice-aajc.org.

Sincerely,
Asian and Pacific Islander American Vote (APIAVote)
Asian Americans Advancing Justice – AAJC
Filipina Women's Network
Japanese American Citizen League
OCA – Asian Pacific American Advocates

National Asian/Pacific American Chamber of Commerce and Entrepreneurship
National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Alliance
Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund