Sept. 17, 2021

The Honorable Maria Cantwell, Chair  
The Honorable Roger Wicker, Ranking Member  
U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chair Cantwell and Ranking Member Wicker,

Without a computer or tablet, more than 11% of consumers across the country can’t connect to the internet -- despite Congress’ significant investments in deploying affordable broadband across the nation. Computers and tablets enable people to apply for jobs, fill out government forms, and successfully complete schoolwork. These tasks are difficult or impossible to do online with just a mobile device or no device. Even if a household lacks home internet, computers and tablets enable consumers to leverage private and public Wi-Fi networks across their communities. This is why Congress must include a program to give low-income consumers device vouchers in the budget reconciliation package.

The unfortunate reality is that most low-income consumers, including many senior citizens, students, and workers, can’t afford to spend hundreds of dollars for a computer or tablet. Thirty-one percent of non-broadband users cite the cost of a computer as one of the reasons they do not have broadband at home. The numbers of those without a device are staggering:

- Across the country, more than 40% of low-income adults don’t own a desktop or laptop.
- More than 7.2 million people aged 65+ do not have a computer at all.
- Thirty-seven percent of schoolchildren in lower-income families had to do their schoolwork on a cellphone and 25% were not able to complete their schoolwork because they lacked access to a computer at home.
- Many more households, including 32% of Latinx families home-schooling during the pandemic, do not have enough computers or tablets, forcing families to make difficult decisions about who can connect and when.

To remedy this problem, Congress must pass a device voucher program that provides a broad array of low-income consumers with a voucher they can use to purchase a high-quality new or refurbished computer or tablet. Each household should be eligible for more than one device so that multiple members of the household can connect simultaneously. The program should also provide for robust advertising of the benefit as well as assistance to help eligible consumers enroll.

Congress can help connect millions of consumers through a device voucher program. We urge you not to miss this important opportunity to further close the digital divide by adopting it as part of the budget reconciliation package. Thank you for your consideration.
Sincerely,

Access Now
Alliance for Community Media
American Association of Service Coordinators
American Council on Education
American Society on Aging
American Telemedicine Association
Asian Americans Advancing Justice - AAJC
Asociación Nacional ProPersonas Mayores
California Center for Rural Policy
Center for Accessible Technology
Center for Democracy & Technology
Center for Rural Strategies
Centro Americano
Charlotte Mecklenburg Library
Christensen Institute for Community Health & Empowerment
City of San Jose, Mayor's Office of Technology & Innovation
Civic Technology Ventures
Common Cause
Communities Closing the Urban Digital Divide
Comp-U-Dopt
Computer CORE
Computer Reach
Connect Your Community Institute
Connecticut Office of Consumer Counsel
ConnectMaine
Consumer Reports (CR)
Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Virginia
Cyberspan Digital Alliance
Dell Technologies
Delta Interfaith
Denver Public Library
Digital Bridge, Inc.
Digital Equity Institute
DigitalC
Digitunity
E-Rate & Educational Services
E-Rate Central
EDUCAUSE
Electronic Access Foundation
Electronic Frontier Foundation
EveryLibrary Institute
Explora
EYEJ: Empowering Youth, Exploring Justice
Fight for the Future
Fort Drum Regional Health Planning Organization
Free Geek
Front Porch Center for Innovation and Wellbeing
Great Works Internet
Health Forward Foundation
Hellerstein & Associates
Helping Link-Mot Dau Noi
Heroes Deserve Help
Higher Learning Advocates
Hopscotch Creative
HP Inc.
HTTP
Human-I-T
IBSA, Inc.
Illinois for Educational Equity
INCOMPAS
Information Technology Exchange
Informative Technologies Inc.
Institute for Local Self-Reliance
Kansas City Public Library
Link Oregon (Oregon Fiber Partnership)
Literacy Solutions NY
Literacy Source
Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC)
MediaJustice
MetroEast Community Media
Microsoft Corporation
Mobile Citizen, a Voqal Project
mohuman
Movement Alliance Project
Multimedia Resource and Training Institute (MMRTI)
NASPA-Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education
National Adult Day Services Association (NADSA)
National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs
National Collaborative for Digital Equity
National Consumer Law Center, on behalf of its low-income clients
National Council on Aging
National Digital Inclusion Alliance
National Hispanic Media Coalition
National League of Cities
NC 100
Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies
NorthEast STEAM Coalition
Oak Hill Collaborative
OpenMedia.
Palmetto Care Connections
Partners Bridging the Digital Divide
PCs for People Maryland
Pennsylvania Utility Law Project
Pottsboro Area Public Library
Prairie STEM
Public Knowledge
Real Change
Renaissance 21
Right Here, Right Now Project
Riverside Language Program, Inc.
San Diego Futures Foundation
Schools, Health & Libraries Broadband Coalition
Southern Oregon Education Service District
St. Paul Community Literacy Consortium
Starry, Inc.
Tech Goes Home
Telecommunications for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Inc (TDI)
The Big-Brained Superheroes Club
The Greenlining Institute
The Islamic Center of Portland, Masjed As-Saber
The Nonprofit Technology Enterprise Network (NTEN)
The Oasis Institute
The STEM Alliance
Together for Hope
University of New Mexico Medical Group
Utah Education and Telehealth Network
Villa Comunitaria
Voqal
Westchester Library System
Windstream
Wisdom of the Elders Inc.
World Computer Exchange, Inc.