



December 12, 2022

The Honorable Ben Ray Luján
Chair
Subcommittee on Communications,
Media, and Broadband
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Thune
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Communications,
Media, and Broadband
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Luján and Ranking Member Thune:

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce respectfully submits the following statement for the record for the Senate Commerce's Subcommittee on Communications, Media, and Broadband hearing titled "Ensuring Solutions to Meet America's Broadband Needs." We commend the Subcommittee for holding his important hearing to exercise oversight over the federal government's broadband accessibility and affordability programs and to seek solutions to bridge the digital divide.

America's communications networks play an essential role in connecting Americans and are revolutionizing the way that people work, learn, seek medical care, and communicate with friends and family. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the private sector played a critical role in keeping the "digital lights" on for the economy. Broadband adoption, access, and affordability serve as crucial building blocks to connect all Americans and enable the internet economy to flourish.

The United States has made significant strides in the last two years to close the digital divide through investing nearly \$80 billion in broadband programs, primarily through the historic investments made by the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). Additionally, the IIJA directed the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to issue several rules on broadband nutrition labeling and the prevention and elimination of digital discrimination. The Chamber provides the following recommendations to the Subcommittee to address broadband access, affordability, and deployment.

To date, more than 15 federal agencies are responsible for managing 130 separate broadband programs. Moving forward, Congress's primary focus should be effectively implementing those programs and maximizing the use of taxpayer dollars. This includes pursuing robust oversight of federal broadband programs, ensuring

effective interagency coordination, and focusing on unserved areas. Furthermore, while the Chamber supports federal investments in broadband, policymakers should not overlook barriers to wireless and wireline broadband deployment, in particular permitting reform. Excessive and time-consuming permitting requirements increase the cost of deployment, making it more costly to close the digital divide. We call on Congress to advance permitting reform legislation to speed up broadband deployment.

The IIJA established the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) to assist low-income Americans purchase internet service and internet-connected devices. The Chamber strongly supports the ACP and we believe the program is critical to allow more Americans access to the internet. However, the future of the ACP is uncertain and funds may be depleted by 2024. It is important that Congress begin to find solutions to ensuring the longevity of the ACP.

Finally, the private sector is making significant investments in broadband. As Congress considers reforming and exercising oversight over federal broadband programs, pursuing policies that undermine private investment should be avoided. Some of the most harmful policies include promoting government-owned networks, promoting overbuild, and imposing burdensome regulatory and labor requirements.

Historic investment in broadband provides the United States a unique opportunity to help close the digital divide and bring high-speed internet access to millions of Americans. The Chamber looks forward to working with relevant federal agencies and Congress to effectively implement federal broadband programs to connect all Americans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. Quaadman', with a long, sweeping underline.

Tom Quaadman
Executive Vice President
Center for Capital Markets Competitiveness
U.S. Chamber of Commerce

cc: Members of the Senate Commerce Subcommittee on Communications, Media, and Broadband