

**Written Statement of
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**Before the Senate Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies**

**“Expanding Broadband Access: Department of Commerce Broadband Programs in the
Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act”**

February 1, 2022

Chair Shaheen, Ranking Member Moran, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the broadband funding in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, better known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

Too many families can’t afford the cost of broadband service, and too many families live in areas where they can’t access high-speed internet.

Gaps in access mean gaps in opportunity: fewer opportunities to learn and work from home, remotely visit doctors, or stay connected with family and friends. Achieving an equitable future means ensuring that all homes and businesses have high-quality connections at affordable prices, and that users have the devices and digital skills needed for meaningful use.

Our economy cannot fully recover unless all Americans can fully participate.

This is why President Biden set an ambitious goal when he entered office: connecting every American through affordable, reliable, high-speed broadband.

I want to thank the many members of this committee – both Democrat and Republican – who worked with us to negotiate the broadband provisions of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, specifically you, Madam Chair, Sen. Manchin, Sen. Collins, and Sen. Murkowski.

I’m proud that the broadband provisions of the bill ultimately helped it to pass with significant bipartisan support.

Thanks to your work, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law provides \$65 billion to deliver reliable, high-speed internet to every American, lower the price of internet service, and help close the digital divide.

Of those funds, \$48.2 billion is allocated to Commerce’s National Telecommunications and Information Administration.

Specifically, the law provides:

- **\$42.45 billion** for the Broadband Equity, Access & Deployment Program (BEAD). The program will award grants to states and territories to fund high-speed affordable broadband for households and businesses that currently lack access to such services.
- **\$2 billion** for Tribal broadband grants, tripling the funding for NTIA’s existing Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program.
- **\$2.75 billion** to fund the Digital Equity Act. This provides NTIA with funding for three grant programs to promote digital inclusion and equity for communities that lack the skills, technologies, and support needed to take advantage of broadband connections.
- **\$1 billion** for middle-mile connections to build a high-speed backbone to help reduce the cost to serve households, businesses, and anchor institutions.

Today, I’m grateful for the opportunity to update you on our progress as we prepare to launch these programs in a little more than 100 days.

We want to ensure that broadband deployment is successful and affordable in every corner of the country, in every type of community, and for your constituents.

Our goal at the Commerce Department is to make sure that every small business, farm, family, and student in America has access to affordable, reliable, high-speed broadband.

We’re focused on getting this done right and giving states the flexibility they need to ensure this benefits everyone.

In Rhode Island, where I come from the challenge there is less about physical broadband infrastructure and more about ensuring affordability. It does no good to live in a location where broadband is available if you can’t afford to get it.

Many rural communities, on the other hand, have no broadband. Our task ahead is to lay the infrastructure and ensure people in even the most rural corners of our country can get online.

Essentially: it doesn’t make sense to address Kansas challenges with Rhode Island solutions.

That’s why the law has built-in flexibility to address each states’ specific needs.

Under the law, each state will get a minimum of \$100 million, and the remaining money will be allocated by need, based primarily on the number of unserved households.

States will be given initial planning funds that they can use to develop a five-year action plan, in collaboration with local and regional entities, to cover everyone in their state.

We're going to work with your states to fund projects that will make the greatest impact and achieve universal broadband access.

This unprecedented investment in closing the digital divide also requires input from a wide range of voices to assist our design and implementation of the new grant programs. Stakeholder engagement is critical to getting this right.

Over the past two months, NTIA has held three virtual, public listening sessions to help inform the development and implementation of the broadband programs in the law. We've met with state and local governments, non-profit and civic organizations, higher education institutions, and industry.

Last month, NTIA issued a request for comment to gain further input into the program design, policy issues, and other implementation considerations for the programs launching this year. Comments are due on February 4.

This work builds on prior broadband programs, including the three grant programs funded by the bipartisan Consolidated Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2021.

The largest of these is the Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program (TBCP), which will award nearly \$1 billion to expand broadband access and adoption on Tribal lands.

We received nearly 300 applications from across the country – from large infrastructure projects to small internet-adoption programs. The requests amount to more than \$5 billion in funds -- a strong signal of the intense need for broadband investments in Native American, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian communities.

As I mentioned, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law appropriated an additional \$2 billion for the TBCP. Last month, NTIA conducted a Tribal Consultation to receive input on this funding.

The Connecting Minority Communities Pilot Program will direct \$268 million toward expanding broadband access and connectivity to eligible Historically Black Colleges or Universities, Tribal Colleges or Universities, minority-serving institutions, and nearby anchor communities.

NTIA has received over 200 applications, resulting in more than \$833 million in funding requests for the purchase of broadband internet service and equipment, among other project goals.

Finally, the Broadband Infrastructure Program will direct \$288 million in grant funding toward the deployment of broadband infrastructure.

NTIA received over 230 applications, totaling more than \$2.5 billion in funding requests across 49 states and U.S. territories.

We expect to make the awards for this program later this month.

Thanks to the historic and bipartisan investments you have made, we're moving towards our goal of connecting all Americans to affordable, high-speed broadband.

We know that for our economy, businesses, and workers to be competitive in the 21st century economy, we need to get this done.

I'm eager to work with you in the months ahead and look forward to answering your questions about the vital work being done at the Department of Commerce to close the digital divide.

Thank you.