

Emergency Broadband Connections Act of 2020 Supporters

Kate Ruane, Senior Legislative Counsel, American Civil Liberties Union: “The Emergency Broadband Connections Act will provide needed access to broadband services for many students, older adults, people with low incomes, and those that have been impacted by the financial crisis. During a global pandemic, where we are all being asked to remain home as much as possible, broadband internet access is more important to our daily lives and to our ability to exercise our First Amendment rights to speak, protest, and petition the government than it has ever been. The Emergency Broadband Connection Act is an important step toward ensuring we will not leave anyone behind.”

Matt Wood, Vice President of Policy, Free Press Action: “The ongoing and once again worsening COVID-19 crisis has fostered renewed recognition of the necessity of internet service. It’s essential if people are going to stay connected to loved ones, jobs, schools, health care and other critical services. But the pandemic has also shone a light on existing racial discrimination and income divides, while increasing those barriers that Black and Brown people already face in finding affordable broadband options. The flexible supports in the Emergency Broadband Connections Act of 2020 would increase the choices people have to get and stay online, providing a true lifeline during this time of social distancing and deepened economic hardship.”

Joshua Stager, Senior Counsel, New America's Open Technology Institute: “For months, millions of Americans have suffered through the COVID-19 pandemic without internet connectivity. It’s unconscionable that Congress hasn’t passed any laws to help these people get access to the internet. We applaud Senator Wyden for stepping up and introducing this bill. We are especially grateful that he added Pell Grant recipients to the bill, ensuring that low-income college students—many of whom have lost their housing and work-study jobs—don’t fall through the cracks.”

Olivia Wein, Staff Attorney, National Consumer Law Center: “Advocates at the National Consumer Law Center applaud U.S. Senator Ron Wyden’s introduction of The Emergency Broadband Connections Act of 2020, a bill that helps low-income households afford home broadband service. Black, Hispanic, American Indians and Alaska Natives have lower broadband subscription rates than their White counterparts and communities of color have been hardest hit by the COVID-19 crisis. The Emergency Broadband Connections Act of 2020 will enable telemedicine, distance learning and online access to the workplace and marketplace for tens of millions of struggling low-income families and unemployed workers while protecting public health during the COVID-19 crisis. The bill also includes urgently needed enhancements to the federal Lifeline program to ensure that this service can meet the voice and data needs of low-income consumers during the pandemic. On behalf of our low-income clients, we commend the leadership of Senator Wyden in introducing this critically important bill.”

Jenna Leventoff, Senior Policy Counsel, Public Knowledge: “The Emergency Broadband Connections Act will ensure that low-income Americans and those financially impacted by COVID-19 are able to get or stay connected during the pandemic. As most activities shift online, including school and work, it is essential for everyone to afford an internet connection. We are pleased to see that under this legislation, Pell-eligible postsecondary students are also eligible for broadband subsidies, preventing them from falling behind in their studies. We also welcome provisions that provide assistance to needy families so they can obtain devices for internet access. Additionally, we support provisions that require Lifeline providers to make unlimited minutes and data available to Lifeline recipients.”

Gigi Sohn, Distinguished Fellow, Georgetown Law Institute for Technology Law and Policy, Benton Senior Fellow and Public Advocate: “The Emergency Broadband Connections Act makes clear what most Americans have known for months – that every American must have access to robust broadband Internet during the COVID-19 pandemic. Broadband Internet access is vital to learning, working, shopping, obtaining health care, connecting with friends and family and importantly, to social distancing. By creating an ‘emergency broadband benefit’ for low-income and recently unemployed Americans, the Act would help mitigate the leading cause of this country’s digital divide – affordability – and would do it in a way that minimizes red tape and ensures that all Americans who are suffering economically right now can stay connected.

“The tens of millions of Americans without broadband access have waited far too long to be full participants in our society, our economy and our culture. Thank you to Senator Wyden and his 26 Senate colleagues for sponsoring this critical bill. The Senate should pass it without delay.”

Yosef Getachew, Media & Democracy Program Director, Common Cause: “The Emergency Broadband Connections Act would provide much-needed support for millions of families struggling to afford a broadband connection during the COVID-19 pandemic. As businesses have shifted to telework policies, schools transitioned to online learning, and the use of telehealth services promoted, the need for affordable broadband has never been greater. But for too long, the price of connectivity has prevented many communities from adopting broadband. The ongoing health crisis has widened the affordability gaps and disparities in broadband connectivity we face today. This legislation ensures millions of families will be able to afford a robust broadband connection. We thank Senator Wyden for his work in introducing this bill and look forward to working with all members of Congress on this important issue to ensure everyone gets connected during the pandemic.”

Cheryl A. Leanza, policy advisor for the United Church of Christ’s media justice ministry, OC Inc.: “The Emergency Broadband Connections Act is essential for our country’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic. No one should lose access to broadband at this time when it is literally a matter of life and death. The EBCA will make sure that the inability to pay for a broadband connection should not deprive anyone of access to health care, an education, a job, or to support services to help them rebound and recover. Access to broadband for all people, including seniors, workers and students of all ages and levels will serve our country in good stead as social distancing continues in the months ahead.”

Ernesto Falcon, Senior Legislative Counsel, Electronic Frontier Foundation: “Broadband access is more essential now than ever before and we welcome efforts by Congress to ensure that no one will lose their connection due to the pandemic.”

Evan Engstrom, Executive Director, Engine: “With a good idea and reliable access to the Internet, entrepreneurs and innovators anywhere in the country can launch and grow a startup, even in a pandemic. We applaud the Emergency Broadband Connections Act for helping keep Americans connected to the Internet during these unprecedented times.”

Eric Null, U.S. Policy Manager, Access Now: “Having broadband is essential to functioning in modern society, yet even in 2020 millions of Americans lack such access, particularly low-income people, people of color, and Indigenous people. To make matters worse, the pandemic has widened the digital divide because many people can no longer afford their broadband service. Senator Wyden's Emergency Broadband Connections Act would help alleviate those burdens and help keep people connected so they don't fall even further behind.”

Stan Adams, Deputy General Counsel & Open Internet Counsel, Center for Democracy & Technology: “The global pandemic has exposed the critical importance of internet connectivity. The Emergency Broadband Connections Act will help keep Americans connected and prevent the digital divide from growing wider due to the economic impacts of COVID-19. The Center for Democracy & Technology looks forward to the bill’s swift passage so that those who need it most can afford essential broadband connectivity during these difficult times.”

Hilary O. Shelton, Director of the NAACP Washington Bureau and Senior Vice President for Policy and Advocacy: “Reliable, affordable, and consistent access to broadband internet service is a basic civil right for all Americans. Regardless of a person’s race, gender, ethnicity, age, station in life, or where they live, access to broadband internet has become a necessity. Whether it be looking for a job, distance learning, tele-medicine, or accessing a ballot, broadband internet access has become a necessary fact of American life. The NAACP sincerely appreciates and applauds the efforts of the House of Representatives to address the continuing needs of too many Americans who right now do not have access to broadband. The HEROES Act does a good job of expanding reliable, affordable, and consistent access to broadband internet service. The NAACP further appreciates the efforts of Senator Wyden and several of his colleagues to cement and in some areas enhance the work of the House. By increasing the eligibility criteria for the Emergency Broadband Benefit and providing additional safeguards for consumers and taxpayers, Senator Wyden’s ‘Emergency Broadband Connections Act of 2020’ would strengthen an already crucial provision”

Julie Peller, Executive Director, Higher Learning Advocates: “Many college students across the country currently lack a stable internet connection or access to technology they need for academic success as online learning continues. Reliable and affordable technology and broadband access for all of today’s students is crucial. The Emergency Broadband Connections Act would provide critical emergency broadband benefits through the Lifeline Program and expand eligibility to families of Pell-eligible students, ensuring that postsecondary students could successfully attend online classes and access course material they need. We support this important step toward creating a more equitable online learning system for today’s students.”

Brenda V. Castillo, President & CEO, National Hispanic Media Coalition: “Before the COVID-19 pandemic, over a third of Latinx families were not connected to the internet at home. Since the pandemic and resulting economic crisis, Latinx are among those most concerned about paying for their mobile phone and internet bills. NHMC commends Senator Wyden’s efforts to close the digital divide, and to expand eligibility for this broadband benefit to families who are hit hardest by the pandemic, including mixed immigration status families. We believe access to the internet is a human right, and affordability of that access will continue to be a key component of connecting our communities in the difficult months of recovery ahead and into 2021.”

Karen Hardigg, Director, Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition: “Before COVID-19, rural communities already suffered disproportionate rates of poverty, and lacked sufficient access to much-needed high-speed internet. The pandemic has only exacerbated these conditions by increasing reliance on broadband and cellular service for telemedicine and remote learning, at a time when communication with friends and family, and access to information is essential. RVCC is happy to see Senator Wyden introduce the Emergency Broadband Connections Act, which will support people in need in all communities, including rural areas.”

Hadass Sheffer, Founding President, The Graduate! Network, Inc.: “The Graduate! Network serves Comebackers - adults who want to finish their degrees, from expressing interest to graduation. There are 37 million America adults with some college but no degree -- yet! The vast majority of the Comebackers we serve are low income earners and many have insufficient access to broadband. While we work with Comebackers in our offices, libraries and other community environments, and by phone or via internet-enabled software, lack of reliable and affordable internet access hampered their ability to enroll and succeed in college when colleges were fully open on-ground. Under COVID-19 restrictions (and looking ahead to the changing world of higher ed) a reliable, affordable internet connection is even more critical. On behalf of the Graduate! Network, I fully support this bill. Thank you.”

Steven Taylor, Founder & CEO, ED2WORK: “As more Americans find themselves in a virtual work and learn environment, access to quality, affordable internet is necessary to take advantage of remote work opportunities and access quality learning in virtual classroom environments. By ignoring the fact that millions of Americans lack broadband access we are simply exacerbating socioeconomic disparities for the most vulnerable Americans.”

Janet Cummings, Senior Advisor, Policy and Government Relations, EDUCAUSE: “The closure of college and university campuses due to the COVID-19 pandemic has left many economically distressed college students without effective access to broadband service when they need it the most. The Emergency Broadband Connections Act represents a major step toward addressing that need by adding Pell Grant eligibility to the factors that make one eligible for the support the Act would distribute via the Lifeline program. EDUCAUSE appreciates that the Emergency Broadband Connections Act takes the vital concerns of college students into account and is happy to support it.”

Vanita Gupta, President and CEO, The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights: “Broadband access is a civil rights issue. The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the need for affordable and accessible broadband, especially in historically marginalized communities. We urge lawmakers to address these alarming connectivity issues immediately as part of the next COVID-19 response and to ensure that all have broadband Internet access that is necessary for health care, employment, civic engagement, education, and more.”

Jessica Howard, District President and CEO, Chemeketa Community College: “Chemeketa Community College supports this bill as this will benefit our most vulnerable students who have been adversely impacted by offering classes remotely. Many of our students have struggled with food and housing insecurity and lack access to reliable and affordable Internet connectivity. These funds will help students stay enrolled in school while we continue to offer instruction and services remotely. Thank you for supporting students in higher education.”

Kyle Southern, Policy and Advocacy Director, Higher Education and Workforce, Young Invincibles: “YI is committed to narrowing the digital divide that presents yet another barrier to many low-income students and students of color in their pursuit of higher education. We thank and congratulate Senators Wyden, Hirono, and Blumenthal for their leadership on this important effort, and we look forward to advocating for it in upcoming legislation.”

Jonathan Schwantes, Senior Policy Counsel, Consumer Reports: “Consumer Reports strongly supports the Emergency Broadband Connections Act authored and introduced by Senator Wyden today. This bill represents a direct, meaningful and effective way to help our most vulnerable Americans affected by the COVID-19 pandemic stay connected to the internet. As millions of Americans have shifted to working, learning, and receiving medical care at home because of the pandemic, the necessity and value of a reliable, affordable internet connection have never been clearer. Many more consumers need better access to the internet that is also more affordable. Providing a direct subsidy to help consumers pay their monthly internet service bill is a straightforward solution and will help immediately. Today's legislation contains real money and solutions that will begin to accomplish those twin goals. CR stands ready to help Congress pass this important and timely measure.”