

Committee on Energy and Commerce

**Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of**

Subcommittee on Communications and Technology Chairman Mike Doyle

Hearing on “Broadband Equity: Addressing Disparities in Access and Affordability”

May 6, 2021

First off, I’d like to thank our witnesses for testifying before the Subcommittee today.

Equity in broadband access, affordability, and adoption is more important than ever.

As Congress works on President Biden’s American Jobs Plan - it is critical that we consider solutions to our nation's infrastructure challenges that not only close the digital divide, but address historic inequities - that have for far too long - left behind black, Hispanic, tribal, and low income communities.

Studies by Pew Research show that communities of color lag predominantly white communities when it comes to the adoption of broadband.

Older Americans and Americans in rural communities lag younger and urban communities respectively in broadband adoption as well.

Due to this Committee’s good work - we were able to come together and establish the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program which provides a monthly benefit to qualifying households for internet service.

We were also able to pass the Emergency Connectivity Fund which will help students get connected through the E-Rate program - as part of the American Recovery Plan.

The EBB program will become available to consumers on May 12th. It will provide a \$50 monthly benefit to qualifying households - for emergency broadband connectivity during the pandemic.

The FCC has setup a portal to help folks navigate this program at [getemergencybroadband.org](https://www.getemergencybroadband.org).

I’m pleased to see that so many broadband providers have applied to participate - it’s critical that more join this program - so that as many folks as possible can take advantage of this benefit.

I’ve also been pleased to see that a number of I-S-Ps expanded access to low income adoption programs during this critical time.

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It's my hope, that as this Committee continues to work on closing the digital divide - that we can create a permanent program to provide broadband connectivity to people in need.

These services are not luxuries - they are necessities that everyone needs in order to participate in society.

We also need to look beyond programs that increase adoption among folks that qualify for means tested programs.

Far too many Americans lack access to affordable rates. Studies have shown that adoption could significantly increase if all consumers had access to more affordable service plans.

Proposals like Congresswoman Eshoo's to expand the availability of municipal networks – or proposals to place open access requirements on networks built with federal funds – could spur competition and reduce prices for consumers.

I've always believed in the power of competition – and study after study has shown that consumers pay more in markets that are served by monopolies and duopolies.

This is particularly true in communities that have been left behind due to redlining.

As we are working to fix the rural – urban divide - we must also address the substandard service – and at times, the lack of service, in communities of color.

Finally, we need programs that expand digital equity programs - that provide outreach and digital literacy and training skills.

The opportunities and resources provided by this technology are wasted if you don't know how to use them.

Too many Americans still lack these essential skills and are missing out and are all too often being left out of our increasingly digitized society.

It's important that we put in place programs to address these skills gaps – but also do the important outreach necessary to engage these communities and help them get online.

That's why I've been proud to work with Chairman Pallone and Majority Whip Clyburn on the Accessible, Affordable, Internet for All Act and President Biden and Vice President Harris on the American Jobs Plan.

These proposals represent the once in a generation investment we need to address these deep-seated digital inequities in our society.

Thank you and I look forward to the testimony of our witness.