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March 11, 2024

The Honorable Laphonza Butler
United States Senate
G10 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable David Valadao
United States House of Representatives
2465 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Alex Padilla
United States Senate
112 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jay Obernolte
United States House of Representatives
1029 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: S. 3565 (Welch) – Affordable Connectivity Program Extension Act of 2024 - SUPPORT

Honorable Members of the Kern Congressional Delegation,

I am writing on behalf of the Kern County Board of Supervisors to urge Congress to extend immediately the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) through the end of 2024. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) issued a public notice yesterday confirming that absent additional funding from Congress, April 2024 is the last fully funded month for the program. It would be prudent to revisit, reform, and reauthorize the ACP to ensure that the most digitally disadvantaged households have affordable home internet service.

Unfortunately, this extraordinary investment in families on the wrong side of the digital divide is winding down at a time when more than 20 million eligible families nationwide have finally found affordable options to connect to remote work, distance learning, health care, and greater economic and societal connection. Without immediate Congressional action to extend the ACP, almost 3 million California households will lose their monthly discount toward broadband services. Being connected to the internet really matters in an increasingly digital society.

The ACP is also critical to the achievement and sustainability of the nation's broadband infrastructure goals. The Broadband Equity and Deployment (BEAD) Program is currently reviewing and approving state plans to accelerate internet access, particularly in areas that have been under or un-served by current facilities. The program has been allocated about \$45 billion to further such deployments and contextualize digital equity programs to incentivize people to use them. Because of the focus on fiber, small and medium-sized providers are likely leveraging federal funding for their buildouts. But without more certain subscribership, these companies could experience extreme financial consequences that lead to a range of outcomes — some even resulting in bankruptcies.

As states are steadily preparing to deploy federally subsidized broadband in areas that will be highly dependent on having subscribers for new and expanded assets, the end of the ACP and what its impacts means for pending infrastructure and the range of stakeholders from subscribers to community organizations has yet to be fully considered. What is known, is that without the ACP or a consumer-driven subsidy to support the broadband marketplace, existing and new broadband providers, cash-strapped customers, and surrounding businesses depending on the connectivity for economic gain all stand to lose in one or many ways.

In addition to extending the ACP, the County of Kern also asks Congress to:

1. Urge Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to continue offering their own affordable subscriptions at rates comparable to the ACP to ensure there are always affordable options for consumers regardless of the future of a federal subsidy program. Most existing ISP affordable offerings were negotiated as a public benefit to secure approval of corporate consolidations. It is only appropriate that the ISPs sustain these public benefits given the continuing profitability of those mergers.
2. Encourage the FCC to collaborate more effectively with state agencies and local government (especially counties) to strategically target households that are not yet connected. The costs of outreach efforts are wasted when they are received by households already online. The FCC can easily share the data it has on connected households enrolled in the ACP to avoid redundant outreach.

We greatly appreciate your attention to this request and urge your strong consideration for our recommended steps to ensure adequate and equitable coverage for our communities. The ACP has already had a measurable impact on over 3 million California households. Your support for S. 3565 to extend the ACP will ensure these positive gains and the significant federal investments in the nation's communications infrastructure are not in vain.

Sincerely,



David Couch, Chairman
Kern County Board of Supervisors

Cc: Honorable Members, California Congressional Delegation
National Association of Counties
California Emerging Technology Fund
California Broadband Council
Carpi & Clay