

EMERGENCY BROADBAND BENEFIT PROGRAM PRESENTATION

FCC February 17, 2021 Open Meeting

Introductory Remarks – Kris Monteith, Chief, WCB

Good morning, Madame Chairwoman and Commissioners. Today the Wireline Competition Bureau will give an update on the status of the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program, a new program established by the Consolidated Appropriations Act to provide much-needed support for broadband service and devices to low-income households during the COVID-19 pandemic. Eric Wu, Attorney Advisor in the Telecommunications Access Policy Division, will give the presentation.

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Emergency Broadband Benefit Program Overview

- I am Eric Wu, an Attorney Advisor in the Telecommunications Access Policy Division in the Wireline Competition Bureau
- This presentation on the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program will cover:
 - Emergency Broadband Benefit Provisions of the Act;
 - The FCC's current work to implement the Act;
 - Next steps

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Overview

- On December 27, 2020, the Consolidated Appropriations Act (the Act) became law.
- The Act, among other changes and actions intended to provide relief during the COVID-19 pandemic, established the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program to support broadband service and equipment for low-income households.

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Emergency Broadband Benefit Program Provisions

- **Funding.** The Act establishes a \$3.2 billion Emergency Broadband Connectivity Fund in the Treasury of the United States and directs the FCC to use that Fund to create the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program (EBBP).
 - The FCC may use up to 2% of the Fund for administrative expenses.
 - The Fund will last for 6 months after the date the Secretary of Health and Human Services determines that a public health emergency as a result of COVID-19 no longer exists, or when the fund is depleted, whichever is earlier.
- **Participating Providers.** Providers must elect to participate in EBBP.
 - Eligible telecommunications carriers that currently participate in the Lifeline program may participate in EBBP without further approval.
 - Other broadband providers that had a low-income or COVID-19 program as of April 1, 2020 may receive automatic approval from the FCC to participate in EBBP.
 - All other broadband providers may seek expedited approval from the FCC to participate in EBBP.

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Emergency Broadband Benefit Program Provisions

- **Broadband Service.** The EBBP benefit will provide a discount of up to \$50 per month on broadband service and associated equipment provided to low-income households.
 - On Tribal lands, the discount increases to up to \$75 per month.
 - Participating providers receive reimbursement for providing discounts on service to eligible low-income households.
 - The plans offered by participating providers must have been offered as of December 1, 2020.
- **Connected Devices.** EBBP will support a one-time discount of up to \$100 off the price of a laptop, desktop computer, or tablet purchased from the participating provider.
 - The household receiving the discount must pay between \$10 and \$50 toward the price of the device.
 - Participating provider will receive the reimbursement for providing the discount on a connected device to eligible low-income households.
- Participating providers must submit certain certifications to the FCC to receive reimbursement.
- FCC is required to adopt audit requirements to ensure provider compliance and prevent waste, fraud, and abuse.

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Emergency Broadband Benefit Program Provisions

- **Eligible Households.** A household may qualify for the EBBP benefit if at least one member of the household:
 - Meets the qualifications for Lifeline;
 - Income at or below 135% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines for a household of that size;
 - At least one member of the household participates in Medicaid, SNAP, Supplemental Security Income, Federal Public Housing Assistance, or Veterans and Survivors Pension Benefit; or
 - For households on Tribal lands, additional eligibility based on participation in certain Tribal benefit programs;
 - Or, the Act has also expanded eligibility beyond those eligible for the Lifeline program, if a member of a household:
 - Has applied for and been approved to receive benefits from the federal free and reduced price lunch program or school breakfast program;
 - Has experienced a substantial loss of income since February 29, 2020;
 - Has received a Federal Pell Grant in the current award year; or
 - Meets the eligibility criteria for a participating provider's existing low-income or COVID-19 program.
- **Eligibility Verification.** Households can verify their eligibility through a variety of mechanisms set forth in the law.

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Implementation

- **Administration.**

- FCC will be using the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC) to administer the EBBP, as allowed under the Act.
 - ☞ USAC operates the Lifeline National Verifier and National Lifeline Accountability Database, which the FCC will leverage for eligibility verifications and reimbursement processing.
- The Act also permits the FCC to apply existing Lifeline program rules to the EBBP.
 - ☞ For example, the definitions of “Household” or “Tribal Lands”

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Timeline and Next Steps

- The FCC sought comment on the EBBP in a January 4, 2021 Public Notice.
- Comments were due on January 25 and 138 parties filed in the proceeding.
- The FCC hosted a Roundtable on February 12, 2021, with two panel discussions -- one on consumer outreach and enrollment, and the second focusing on broadband provider participation and consumer choice.
- Reply comments were due yesterday, February 16, 2021.
- The Act requires the FCC to promulgate rules within 60 days of enactment of the Act.
 - The FCC and USAC are currently working on developing the Order to establish the program rules and standing up program systems.
- Thank you.