

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology Ranking Member Doris Matsui

Hearing on “From Introduction to Implementation: A BEAD Program Progress Report”

September 10, 2024

Thank you, Chairman Latta.

Today’s hearing focuses on a program we should all want to succeed. The Broadband, Equity, Access, and Deployment or BEAD program represents our best shot at connecting every American to affordable, high-quality broadband.

This is a tremendous task requiring thoughtful planning and coordination between our federal agencies and states. Thanks to the hard work of NTIA and our state and local governments, BEAD achieved substantial milestones this year.

NTIA is laying the groundwork to ensure this historic \$42 billion investment is deployed responsibly to expand high-speed internet access, consistent with the multiyear process established by Congress in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. First, NTIA successfully approved every state’s Volume One Initial Proposals. This allows each state to launch a review process to confirm whether a location has high-speed broadband, ensuring that BEAD dollars go where they’re most needed. To date, NTIA also has approved over 40 states’ Volume Two Initial Proposals. This is a critical step for states to begin selecting the broadband projects that will receive funding. Additionally, NTIA has obligated more than \$20 billion in BEAD funding to states and territories for planning and execution. To further set up BEAD for success, NTIA has actively engaged with public feedback. Just last month, the agency welcomed input on its proposed guidance for choosing the right mix of technologies to connect even the most remote areas.

All this is to say: BEAD is on track. NTIA is implementing this program within the timeline set under law—and with the care and deliberation necessary to ensure that BEAD can connect the tens of millions of Americans who still lack affordable broadband. We all want the program to move quickly and get people connected. But when the stakes are this high, we need to measure twice and cut once, or we may fail and waste billions of dollars.

What’s more, we must remember that BEAD is not just about building out infrastructure. It’s about securing affordable, accessible broadband for all. That’s why Congress required state BEAD plans to include a “low-cost” option. And why Ranking Member Pallone and I, along with every Democrat on this Subcommittee, sent a letter earlier this year supporting NTIA prioritizing affordability as it reviews state plans. Almost two-thirds of Californians without home broadband say cost is a key reason. In my district, I hear about the need for broadband affordability whether I’m in downtown Sacramento or in our farming communities down in the delta.

Similarly, we have the opportunity today to hear from the Montana Broadband Office, whose state survey found that affordability was the second most cited reason why people went without high-speed internet.

Affordability and accessibility go hand in hand when closing the digital divide and ensuring BEAD's success. And the high cost of broadband affects all Americans. That's why I'm glad that NTIA is working to ensure that state BEAD plans have robust affordability measures tailored to local needs. This work has only grown in urgency with the lapse in funding for the Affordable Connectivity Program. To truly meet BEAD's goal of connecting every un- and underserved American with high-speed internet, Congress must restore ACP. ACP would build a reliable customer base for providers as they harness BEAD funding to deploy to our hardest-to-reach areas.

Democrats remain laser focused on extending ACP funding to restore low-cost broadband to the millions of impacted families. I urge my colleagues from across the aisle to work with us to bring back this vital program. With that, I want to thank the witnesses for appearing before us today, and I look forward to the discussion.

I yield the remainder of my time.