

AMERICAN CONNECTION PROJECT



January 28, 2021

The Honorable Joseph Biden
President of the United States
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. President and Congressional Leaders:

On behalf of our collective companies and organizations, we look forward to working closely with you to address the pressing issues before the country today and to position America for a more inclusive and prosperous future.

We are writing as members of the American Connection Project, which represents more than 140 companies and organizations who are working together to bring high-speed internet access to all Americans. We collectively represent the agriculture, health care, finance, technology, education, and energy sectors across all American geographies.

Together, at this critical time in our nation's history, the American Connection Project partners are working to bring high-speed internet infrastructure to areas that do not have service. In addition to advocating for policy change, members are contributing their own resources to facilitate remote education, telehealth, job opportunities and more as we lift up all American communities through access to modern digital technology. Some members of the coalition have taken significant steps to deploy fiber and other robust connections directly to customers during this emergency. As a service to communities across America, the coalition has turned on over 2,800 free public Wi-Fi locations across 49 states to allow families to complete distance learning assignments, access telehealth appointments, and conduct daily business. We are providing this critical access during the pandemic but recognize this is not the long-term solution.

Broadband connectivity is a critical enabler to help solve many issues facing our country including climate change, inclusive education access for students and families, better paying jobs, and more balanced economic opportunities.

As the global COVID-19 pandemic shined a bright light on America's digital divide, millions shifted to working from home, school districts closed and resorted to distance learning platforms, and increasingly, patients sought health care through telemedicine platforms. High-speed internet became essential to everyday life.

According to the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) latest [broadband deployment report](#), 14.5 million Americans lack internet connectivity.¹ However, a [BroadbandNow study](#) released in February 2020 estimates that as many as 42 million Americans do not have the ability to purchase broadband internet.²

An [FCC report from 2017](#) estimates it would cost \$80 billion to bring high-speed internet to the remaining parts of our country that do not have access.³ In 2019, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) [issued a report](#), citing Deloitte data, that estimated it would require "between \$130 and \$150 billion over the next five to seven years, to adequately support rural coverage and 5G wireless densification."⁴

In today's economy, communities, children, and families without access are left behind, and the consequences are staggering from an economic, health, education, and social standpoint. We need to fix this problem, together.

Today, we call for immediate action from the Administration and Congress to enact groundbreaking broadband connectivity legislation. As a coalition, we are advocating for:

- An investment of at least \$80 billion to close the digital divide across America;
- Strong leadership and coordination at the executive branch level to position our country as a technology leader to ensure economic competitiveness and to maintain strong national security; and
- Swift implementation of the Broadband DATA Act.

Further, we call on the Administration and Congress to take immediate steps to continue the advances we have made in telehealth. We appreciate the flexibilities provided during the COVID-19 public health emergency by the federal government. As a coalition we are advocating for:

- Passage of legislation to allow the regulatory flexibilities granted during the COVID-19 emergency to be allowed to continue for at least one year following the end of the emergency to allow sufficient time to evaluate permanent policy changes;
- Enactment of legislation or executive action to make reimbursement of telehealth services at sustainable rates over the long term; and
- Passage of legislation that allows the ability of clinicians to provide care across state lines without excess burden or cost to improve patient access to health care services and meeting patients where they are.

As we look to help our nation respond to and recover from this global pandemic, let's equalize the digital playing field so that every American has a chance to win.

We look forward to working closely with you to close America's digital divide. Please see the attached documents which provide additional information on the coalition and lay out our policy priorities around broadband and telehealth. If you have any questions or we can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact Matthew Wohlman at mwohlman@landolakes.com or Michael Daniels at mdaniels@landolakes.com.

¹ FCC 2021 Broadband Deployment Report: <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/FCC-21-18A1.pdf>

² BroadbandNow study released in February 2020: <https://broadbandnow.com/research/fcc-underestimates-unserved-by-50-percent>

³ Federal Communications Commission Study: *Improving the Nations Digital Infrastructure*: https://transition.fcc.gov/Daily_Releases/Daily_Business/2017/db0119/DOC-343135A1.pdf

⁴ United States Department of Agriculture: *A Case for Rural Broadband*: <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/case-for-rural-broadband.pdf>

Sincerely,

