



Vermont Community Broadband Board (VCBB)

112 State Street

Montpelier, VT 05620-2601

<https://publicservice.vermont.gov/vcbb>

January 25, 2024

Dear Honorable Members of the Vermont Senate and House of Representatives:

I am writing to let you know about the potential imminent end of an important federal program and its effect on low-income Vermonters. The Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) is expected to run out of funds by the end of April 2024. The ACP provides a \$30/month discount on internet service for eligible households that are at or below 200% of the federal poverty guidelines. Your constituents enrolled in the program will receive notice of the program's end likely by the end of this week.

In one of the VCBB listening sessions, a mother of four talked about how important the ACP is for her family. She is a single mother with two children and a victim of domestic violence. One of her children suffers from mental health issues and therefore she has to work from home. She currently only makes \$986 per month and her Internet bill without the ACP would be \$85/month.

The ACP currently assists 25,000 Vermonters to afford their internet service. When this program ends, many if not all these families may no longer be able to afford their internet service. As you know, without an internet connection children struggle to complete homework and access educational opportunities, people can't work remotely, take advantage of telehealth and online banking. They miss out on social connections, can become isolated, and this reality is especially acute in areas with poor or no cell phone service.

It is the VCBB's mission to "coordinate, facilitate, support and accelerate the development and implementation of universal community broadband solutions."¹ A key component of successful broadband deployments is the delivery of affordable broadband service plans. The loss of the ACP Program will essentially remove the floor for low-income Vermonters, the most vulnerable of our residents, and require considerable alternative funding to achieve digital equity. VCBB is developing affordability policies and recommendations for proposals, which it intends to share with you in the near future.

¹ 30 V.S.A. § 8081





We have been working with Senator Peter Welch as he introduced legislation to extend funding for the ACP. We, along with advocates from several social service organizations, joined the Senator at a press conference earlier this month calling for an extension of the program. You can watch it here: [Senator Peter Welch Press Conf: Intro of Affordable Connectivity Program Extension Act - 1/12/2024 \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...).

Earlier this week, Sen. Welch spoke on the Senate floor about the importance of extending funding for the ACP. “We have a decision that we have to make as a Congress. Will we maintain this bipartisan commitment we’ve had to the citizens of this country to make certain that everybody, regardless of income, has the best possible opportunity to have access to high-speed internet that is as essential to our well-being, our social connection, our sense of working together, as electricity was in the ‘30s?” said Sen. Welch. “25,000 Vermont families have benefitted by it. 22.5 million American families have benefitted by it. Let us continue the program, find the \$7 billion that is necessary to maintain this, and make sure that the progress we’ve made working together to build out high-speed internet and make it accessible to all our citizens continues.”

We hope Congress will act to avoid the end of the ACP, but we have been informed that customers are starting to get notices from their internet service providers that the program is ending, so we felt it was important to inform you all about the situation.

While the program enjoys bipartisan support, funding has yet to be approved to extend the program. We are nearing the time when State action may be required to ensure Vermonters do not suffer from the inaction of Congress. Whether this action requires a temporary, or a more permanent fix, remains to be seen.

We are always available to discuss this issue further and/or to provide testimony on the status of the VCBB affordability efforts and suggestions as to how the state could replace or supplement the Affordable Connectivity Program. Thank you for your time and attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Christine D. Hallquist".

Executive Director Christine Hallquist

