



Press Statement

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MMTC Supports Congressman Butterfield's 'Expanding Opportunities for Broadband Deployment Act' to Expand Access to Universal Service Fund Subsidies

WASHINGTON, D.C. (June 12, 2020): Congressman G. K. Butterfield yesterday released H.R. 7160 "to amend the Communications Act of 1934 to promote broadband deployment by increasing participation in broadband support programs." The Multicultural Media, Telecom and Internet Council (MMTC) strongly supports this legislation, also known as the "Expanding Opportunities for Broadband Deployment Act," which will expand access to Universal Service Fund (USF) subsidies, providing much-needed support to the communities that rely on USF programs such as Lifeline and E-Rate.

At present, any internet service provider (ISP) wishing to receive a subsidy from the Universal Service Fund (USF) must first receive an "eligible telecommunications carrier" (ETC) designation from states or the FCC. Under current FCC auction procedures, a bidder in the upcoming Auction 904 process is required to prove ETC designation when the bidder has been notified of the winning census tract(s), but before the expiration of 180 days thereafter. The process of securing an ETC designation is time-consuming, and can be especially difficult for small businesses that are reliant on USF participation to be competitive in the telecom field. During the pandemic, navigating the ETC credentialing process is particularly challenging.

The proposed legislation would suspend the ETC eligibility requirement for the duration of the pandemic. According to a statement released by Congressman Butterfield, the language is designed to enable more broadband service providers to participate in the FCC's USF programs by eliminating an outdated requirement that only ISPs designated as ETCs may receive USF dollars.

This action is especially necessary amid the nation's current crisis, where over 44 million Americans have filed for unemployment, 55 million students are at home, and 27 percent of U.S. adults do not have the home broadband connections their households need to access education, employment, telehealth, civic engagement, and more. With millions still sheltering in place, access to home broadband connections is vital, and legislation and policies that provide relief to struggling families are of utmost importance. Because H.R. 7160 will allow more ISPs to receive USF funding, which covers the Lifeline program, the E-Rate Schools and Libraries program, the Rural Healthcare Fund, and the Connect America Fund, more families that are in critical need will be served.

"Struggling families need access to broadband for school, work, telehealth services, civic engagement, and social justice now more than ever before – but many cannot afford it when the priority is keeping the lights on or putting food on the table," stated MMTC President and CEO Maurita Coley. "Similarly, small, minority-owned businesses can be precluded from participation in USF programs and census tract auctions due to the difficult ETC designation process. Congressman Butterfield's legislation is a bold move designed to help reach the families that need help most right now, support the ISPs that serve them, and provide families and communities with the connectivity they need. We applaud the Congressman's action, which will help provide much-needed relief in these difficult times."

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About MMTC:

The Multicultural Media, Telecom and Internet Council (MMTC) is a non-partisan, national nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting and preserving equal opportunity and civil rights in the mass media, telecom and broadband industries, and closing the digital divide. MMTC is generally recognized as the nation's leading advocate for multicultural advancement in communications.