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CONTACT:

Rodell Mollineau

rodell@rokksolutions.com

Diverse Coalition Launches to Close the Digital Divide

Broadband Equity for All Calls for a Predictable, Dependable, Long-Term, Broadband Benefit Program

Washington, D.C., — Today, more than 40 leading civil rights organizations, consumer groups, and private sector leaders announced the formation of a new coalition to ensure that all Americans, no matter where they live or how much money they make, are connected to the internet. The coalition, Broadband Equity for All, aims to work collaboratively with policymakers to ensure every American can get and stay connected.

Broadband Equity for All believes it's time for Congress to adopt a federally-funded broadband benefit program that would be managed and administered by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to provide low-income households with enhanced financial support that will be available long after the pandemic ends. A predictable, dependable, long-term broadband benefit program would help ensure that all people across the nation are connected, and help guarantee the educational benefits, health care access, and economic prosperity that come with the ability to get online.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that a broadband internet connection in the home is no longer a nicety; it is a necessity and is a matter of civil and human rights and economic justice," **National Urban League President and CEO Marc H. Morial** said. "Families living in cities where broadband is deployed are even less likely to be connected than families living in rural areas where service isn't available, and that's mainly because they can't afford the service. Disproportionately, these are people of color who are of low or modest income. The emergency broadband benefit is a start, but we need a long-term, sustainable solution to begin closing the digital divide for all Americans."

"For far too long the digital divide for our community has only grown. Over 35 percent of Latino families still lack access to quality broadband. As our world becomes more and more digital, affordable internet access is needed to expand the economic opportunities for our community to thrive. We need a permanent solution so that any family can access the internet without having to sacrifice food or other

necessities. The time is now," said **Sindy M. Benavides, Chief Executive Officer, League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)**.

Coalition members believe that while there has been progress to close the digital divide, more needs to be done. Approximately 10-15 million students don't have broadband at home. People with disabilities are 20 percent less likely to be connected to broadband at home or have the technology to go online than those without disabilities. Forty percent of seniors don't have residential service sufficient to meet with their doctors for telemedicine appointments, which have increasingly taken on life-and-death importance.

"Black, Brown and Indigenous households are overrepresented in the digital divide – which has only continued to widen in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic," said **Janet Murguía, President and CEO of Unidos**. "The lack of a reliable connection exacerbates the inequities these communities continue to face; from disparate health outcomes to education attainment to the wage gap and beyond."

"Too many Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) households are negatively impacted by the digital divide," said **Emily Chi, Asian Americans Advancing Justice's (AAJC) Assistant Director, Telecommunications, Technology, and Media**. "Securing reliable, high-quality, and affordable access to broadband for all can uplift our more vulnerable communities. Internet is an essential service for AAPI communities to access quality education and healthcare, connect with families and loved ones in the U.S. and abroad, and pursue new economic opportunities and skills. Broadband access will remain an important equity issue even beyond the duration of the pandemic."

Efforts by broadband providers to connect low-income Americans through discounted offerings have succeeded in connecting millions of people, but more needs to be done.

"We believe no patient should be left behind," said **Mara McDermott, Partnership to Advance Care (PAVC) Spokeswoman**. "As innovation in healthcare continues to advance, it is critical that we address inequities in broadband access now before the digital divide continues to widen."

"The Balm in Gilead is excited to be a member of the Broadband Equity for All. We provide virtual health learning sessions to black churches and black people across the black rural south," said **Dr. Pernessa Seele, Founder and CEO of The Balm in Gilead**. "We need a permanent broadband subsidy for these communities who are not connected to the internet."

The new Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) created by Congress in December 2020 to help economically vulnerable families stay connected during COVID-19 was an important first step. The coalition believes creating a long-term solution like EBB will ensure every American get can get and stay connected.

"It is clear that there is a broadband emergency in America. Our historic failure to close the digital divide has had a devastating effect on communities of color, some of who still live in digital darkness in rural and urban America. The EBB begins the emendation of inaccessibility, but we need urgent and bold action to gain long-term internet subsidies to augment gaps while we work to strengthen our infrastructure. The Broadband Equity for All coalition gives us an opportunity to collectively move forward to get all of us online," said **Tylik McMillan, Tech Policy Advisor, National Action Network (NAN)**.

"While the digital divide has plagued the Hispanic community for decades, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the critical nature of access for our poorest and most rural communities," said **Amy L. Hinojosa, President and CEO - MANA, A National Latina Organization**. "Temporary relief in the form of an Emergency Broadband Benefit is getting our students and families connected as we near the end of the pandemic, but Congress must act to provide a lasting solution to ensure those in the most need are never left disconnected from school, work, health resources, and lifesaving information ever again."

The federal government has never adopted a robust, long-term, and coordinated program focused on specifically helping more people get connected to the internet. And while Congress should be commended for allocating funding to build out broadband in rural America – a job that needs to continue until complete – addressing the rural broadband challenge is only part of the solution. Coalition members stand ready to work collaboratively with policymakers to ensure low-income Americans can receive the educational benefits, health care access, and economic prosperity that come with the ability to get online.

"The United States Distance Learning Association (USDLA) is excited to be a part of the Broadband Equity for All Coalition," said **Reggie Smith III Ph.D. CEO of USDLA**. "As the first nonprofit distance learning association in the United States to support distance learning research, development, and praxis across the complete arena of education, training, and communications, we stand ready to support this collaborative effort to close the digital divide."

"The Multicultural Media and Telecom Internet Council is on record with the FCC for advocating for a permanent broadband subsidy. Therefore, joining this chorus of community advocates, public interest tech, businesses, and community leaders resonates with our mission of using policy and advocacy to build equitable tech futures for underrepresented communities in this country. Our vision is to create a fully connected, educated, healthy, and empowered society in which all communities thrive," said **Maurita Coley, CEO and President of The Multicultural Media and Telecom Internet Council (MMTC)**.

Member organizations of Broadband Equity for All include:

ACA Connects – America’s Communications Association
African American Mayors Association
American Association of People with Disabilities
Asian Americans Advancing Justice
AT&T
The Balm in Gilead Inc.
Black Women’s Roundtable
Business Forward
Charter
Comcast
Conference of National Black Churches
Japanese American Citizens League
The Latino Coalition
League of United Latin American Citizens
LGBT Tech
MANA, A National Latina Organization
Microsoft
Multicultural Media, Telecom and Internet Council
National Asian/Pacific Islander American Chamber of Commerce & Entrepreneurship
National Action Network
National Asian Pacific Center on Aging National
Black Caucus of State Legislators
National Black Farmers Association
National Coalition on Black Civic Participation
National Consumers League
National Council of Asian Pacific Americans
National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators
National Hispanic Media Coalition
National LGBT Chamber of Commerce
National Organization of Black Elected Legislative Women
National Urban League
OCA - Asian Pacific American Advocates
Partnership to Advance Virtual Care
Southern Youth Leadership Development Institute
Texas e-Health Alliance
Third Way
UnidosUS
United States Black Chambers Inc.
United States Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
US Distance Learning Associates
Verizon

To learn more about Broadband Equity for All, visit the coalition’s website [here](#).

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