November 11, 2013

The Honorable Mark Pryor
Chairman, Subcommittee Committee on Communications, Technology and the Internet
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Roger Wicker
Ranking Member, Subcommittee Committee on Communications, Technology and the Internet
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Re: Hearing on Broadband Adoption: The Next Mile

Dear Chairman Pryor and Ranking Member Wicker:

My name is Lilian P. Coral, and I serve as the Director of 2-1-1 California. Under the fiscal sponsorship of the United Ways of California, 2-1-1 California is a statewide network of local 2-1-1 information and referral providers authorized by the California Public Utilities Commission and the Federal Communications Commission to use the 2-1-1 code as an easy-to-remember and universally recognizable number that would enable a critical connection between individuals and families in need and the appropriate community-based organizations and government agencies. 2-1-1 California's mission is to develop the statewide infrastructure and support necessary to ensure quality 2-1-1 services for everyone. In California, 2-1-1 is accessible in 30 counties servicing 93% of Californians.

I am writing this letter to add additional information to the record for the Broadband Adoption: The Next Mile hearing. We were fortunate to be recipients of an American Recovery and Reinvestment Act grant through the National Telecommunications and Information Administration to focus on Broadband Awareness and Adoption and between March 2010 and June 2013 2-1-1 California through its 2-1-1 partners:

- Provided outreach and education to 229,481 callers
- Screened and referred 59,775 callers to computer and Internet-related resources

As follow-up, 2-1-1 California through its 2-1-1 partners, conducted surveys and interviews with approximately 6% of these callers to find out whether they had participated in any computer/Internet related training classes, subscribed to broadband or received a free or low cost computer as a result of the referrals they received from 2-1-1. Based on the survey results, we estimate that:

- 7,478 households subscribed to broadband
- 4,318 adults participated in a training class
- 3,659 households received a computer
- 4,555 children were connected to the Internet

2-1-1 California
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Unfortunately, the Digital Divide continues to disproportionally impact thousands of low- income families throughout California and especially in some of our major urban centers. Based on in-depth screening and referral protocols, callers told 2-1-1 Specialists that the main reason they did not have broadband at home was that they did not own a computer (41%). The second biggest reason was cost (36%).

We believe broadband adoption is an imperative for economic prosperity, quality of life and family self-sufficiency and support the recommendations put forth by the California Emerging Technology Fund for accelerating Broadband adoption. Our Data and experience indicate that the majority of people without broadband at home do want to adopt the technology and understand the value proposition.

We think it is particularly important that there be stronger partnerships that can help community-based organizations like our own, who are trusted messengers, connect those still unconnected to truly affordable broadband options that will ensure low-income families connect, and stay connected, to broadband, to access the richness of resources and education that the internet affords.

Respectfully,

Lilian P. Coral

Lilian P. Coral
Director, 2-1-1 California

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November 8, 2013

The Honorable Mark Pryor
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United States Senate
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The Honorable Roger Wicker
Ranking Member, Subcommittee Committee on Communications, Technology and the Internet
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Re: Hearing on Broadband Adoption: The Next Mile

Dear Chairman Pryor and Ranking Member Wicker:

My name is Alicia Orozco, and I serve as Project Manager of the Get Latinos Connected project (GLC) of the Chicana Latina Foundation, based in the San Francisco Bay Area. The GLC project seeks to end the digital divide that keeps the Latino community from connecting to the internet, and thus fully participating in the 21st Century. We are a non-profit organization which promotes professional and leadership development of Latinas. The Foundation's mission is to empower Chicanas/Latinas through personal, educational, and professional advancement.

I am writing this letter to add additional information to the record for Broadband Adoption: The Next Mile hearing. We were fortunate to be recipients of an American Recovery and Reinvestment Act grant through the National Telecommunications and Information Administration to focus on Broadband Awareness and Adoption. With that project, were able to sign up 1,070 first-time internet users. That is 1,070 new Latino internet users. The majority of these homes have children who now enjoy access to the online world and who have improved their class work.

We strongly advocate for broadband at home and Digital Literacy training as described in the National Broadband Plan, and we are making the suggestions described in this letter with the goal of giving all Americans access to digital tools and skills to improve their lives.

While we find the Comcast Internet Essentials program to be helpful to some Bay Area families, there are several barriers that impede many more households from participating.

We recommend that:

Comcast extend its program from 2014 until 2017 and set adoption goals. As Comcast Executive Vice President David Cohen testified before your subcommittee, the company has "learned a lot over the first two years" of the three- year program. Currently, Internet Essentials is scheduled to end I June 2014. From a California perspective, where nearly half of Latino households do not have access to high-speed Internet at home, this is not the time to halt the program. Comcast is the main cable provider in the San Francisco Bay Area. We also recommend that Comcast set national adoption targets as a percentage of eligible households, and similar targets in major markets, such as the San Francisco Bay Area. In addition to disclosing adoption goals, it would be very helpful for non-profits like ours if Comcast would share information about where they are targeting the broadband offer, including providing lists of schools where students are eligible for Comcast Internet Essentials. We have been asking for the list of auto-qualified schools since the program started and we're still waiting for that list.

The online application is useless. We have yet to be able to actually use it. We've held Technology Fairs where we have set up computer banks so that they can actually sign up people for Internet Essentials, but have been unable to because the online application does not work. We keep getting bounced off.

We also have become aware of the fact that when a person calls Comcast to sign up for Internet Essentials, they are being asked how many children they have in the program. Then the Comcast agent chooses the oldest child to enroll in the program. This means the family will be "kicked out" of the program sooner, because the discount only lasts as long as the child is in school. So if an eligible family has a child in high school and another in elementary schools (both on the National Lunch program) by enrolling the high school student, the family loses several years of eligibility for Internet Essentials.

Comcast remove the 90-day requirement. Comcast will not allow low-income families who are already Internet subscribers, or have subscribed in the past 90 days, to switch to the cheaper Internet Essentials service. If a family has subscribed to the Internet as part of a Comcast bundled service, they must stop service for 90 days before they become eligible for the $9.95 month Internet service.

Comcast increase support of local and regional digital literacy programs. Many of the families we serve need computer literacy training to take full advantages of their broadband connections. CLF has worked effectively with schools, faith-based communities, local employers, health clinics and job-training programs to incorporate digital literacy and workforce training. We would welcome additional commitments by Comcast to help fund essential training programs like these.

Comcast increase support of local and regional digital literacy programs. Many of the families we serve need computer literacy training to take full advantage of their broadband connections to the Internet. The Chicana/Latina Foundation has worked effectively with schools, churches, health clinics, job-training programs and social service providers to incorporate digital literacy and workforce training. We would welcome additional commitments by Comcast to help fund essential training programs like these.

Comcast expand the program to include low-income seniors, people with disabilities and veterans. Recent polling on home broadband use in California shows that seniors and people with disabilities adopt high-speed home Internet at significantly lower rates than other populations. Often homebound, these clients are among the most vulnerable we serve, and an affordable Internet connection would significantly improve their access to vital services and the quality of their lives.

Elected officials and policymakers should know that while Comcast has made improvements to its discounted broadband offer, the company should make Internet Essentials available beyond June 2014 and expand eligibility as described above if it desires to be a leader in closing the Digital Divide in California.

Respectfully,

Alicia Orozco
Project Manager
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Re: Hearing on Broadband Adoption: The Next Mile

Dear Chairman Pryor and Ranking Member Wicker:

I am writing on behalf of the Office of Community and Economic Development (OCED) at California State University, Fresno (Fresno State). Through our community-based programs, we and our partners annually help thousands of San Joaquin Valley (Valley) residents gain access to services vital to their lives, including high-speed Internet at home.

This letter is to provide input to the record for the Broadband Adoption: The Next Mile hearing. Specifically, we wish to comment on the disappointing experience we have had in trying to connect families to the Internet Essentials Program offered by Comcast. Also, we ask you to support this much-needed program by extending the program beyond the proposed June 2014 date.

Comcast is one of the largest broadband providers for rural areas of the San Joaquin Valley, one of the poorest regions of California. When first introduced, we welcomed Internet Essentials as an opportunity to connect our traditionally un-served population. However, based on the substantial hurdles our residents face when signing up for Internet Essentials, we find ourselves reluctant to support the program due to the long wait before customers can begin using the Internet at home.

The waiting period between the initial call to Internet Essentials and the application arriving in the mail is 8-12 weeks, if the letter comes at all. After submitting the application, another 2-4 weeks elapse before the equipment arrives. Many Valley residents do not have Social Security numbers and are therefore forced to drive long distances to verify identification since Comcast has closed many of its regional offices.

Leaders in the San Joaquin Valley have been pushing for online registration since the beginning of the Internet Essentials Program. Despite what Comcast says, the system is not working properly. The site is often unable to complete address eligibility searches and simply redirects the customer to the 1-855 number again. We understand that new systems need time to work out the bugs, but we have been trying to work with Comcast for many weeks to provide consumer feedback about the poor website operations, to no avail.

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Comcast does not effectively advertise Internet Essentials in our area, so our community partners use grassroots educational campaigns to let families know about the program. Comcast also does not provide timely data to tell us which schools are undersubscribed for Internet Essentials so our partners can make best use of their resources to target un-served families for adoption.

My greatest concern, with the program scheduled to end in June 2014, is that the discounted offer will only be available for new enrollments for a few more months, leaving many Valley residents unable to take advantage of this opportunity to connect to broadband at home.

Please consider the Office of Community and Economic Development at California State University, Fresno a supporter of extending the Internet Essentials Program.

If you have any questions regarding our support of expanding the Internet Essentials Program please contact me at mdozier@csufresno.edu or by telephone at 559-294-6027.

Sincerely,

Mike Dozier
Executive Director

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Re: Hearing on Broadband Adoption: The Next Mile

My name is Martin O. Gomez and I serve as Principal at Santee Education Complex based in Los Angeles. We serve 1,850 college bound students in the South L.A. community in which 100% of our students qualify for free and reduced lunch.

I am writing this letter on behalf of Santee Education Complex and our community to add additional information to the record for the Broadband Adoption: The Next Mile hearing. Unfortunately, the Digital Divide continues to disproportionally impact thousands of low- income students attending Los Angeles schools. Last year, several of those schools located in some of the most economically challenged areas in Los Angeles were invited to participate in a pilot program sponsored by Time Warner Cable (TWC), which according to the company's own estimates serves one quarter of California households.

With much national publicity, TWC announced that it would offer a low-cost broadband offer at $9.95 for families with students participating in the National School Lunch program at 19 Los Angeles-area schools. This pilot was offered for only two months, from October 1 until November 30, 2012, and without visible outreach by TWC to promote the program. Many of us had hoped that the two-month pilot would offer valuable lessons on the enrollment process and marketing and customer service, which then would allow TWC to scale up the program to reach all students in the National School Lunch program. In fact, the pilot turned out to be a very short "limited time offer". According to the California Emerging Technology Fund, TWC enrolled just 1,200 families nationally in 500 schools.

Even more disappointing, TWC did not offer any explanation as to why they stopped the discount program completely while other cable providers in California saw the value of helping low-income families subscribe to broadband at home.

We think elected officials and policymakers should know that this is a missed opportunity for the largest cable provider in California to play a leadership role in closing the Digital Divide and achievement gap in our state.

Respectfully,

Martin O. Gomez, PhD
Instructional Leader at Santee Education Complex

See our Falcons SOAR at www.santeefalcons.org!

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Re: Hearing on Broadband Adoption: The Next Mile

My name is Luis Granados, and I serve as Executive Director of the Mission Economic Development Agency (MEDA), based in San Francisco. The Mission Economic Development Agency (MEDA) is a community-based, local economic development corporation located in the Mission District of San Francisco. For 40 years MEDA has worked to improve economic and social conditions in the neighborhood by stimulating investment, enhancing the business environment, and creating jobs for area residents, with an emphasis on the Latino community in San Francisco. MEDA engages the local community with homeownership counseling, foreclosure intervention, small business development services, financial education, free tax preparation, and technology training and workforce development.

I am writing this letter on behalf of MEDA to add additional information to the record for the Broadband Adoption: The Next Mile hearing. We were fortunate to be recipients of an American Recovery and Reinvestment Act grant through the National Telecommunications and Information Administration to focus on Access to Careers in Technology and, earlier this year the Department of Education granted MEDA a $30 million Mission Promise Neighborhood Grant aimed at helping students at underperforming schools San Francisco.

We strongly advocate for broadband at home and digital literacy training as described in the National Broadband Plan, and we are making the suggestions described in this letter with the goal of giving all Americans access to digital tools and skills to improve their lives.

In our work with Comcast we have found the Internet Essentials program to offer high-quality, reliable broadband service to some of the people who need it most. Our clients who have subscribed are generally happy with the program. However, there are several barriers that impede many more households from participating.

We recommend that Comcast take the following steps to ensure that the maximum amount of eligible and needy families can benefit from Internet Essentials:

Extend Internet Essentials from 2014 until 2017. As Comcast Executive Vice President David Cohen testified recently before your subcommittee, the company has "learned a lot over the first two years" of the three-year program. Currently, Internet Essentials is scheduled to end

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in June 2014. From a California perspective, where nearly half of Latino households do not have high-speed Internet access at home, Comcast should continue the program.

In addition, in the first years of the program Internet Essentials sign-ups were impacted as we worked with eligible families to overcome hurdles in the subscription process, challenges that resulted in damaged community confidence in the product. These hurdles included:

*Clients receiving letters from Comcast saying that they had failed a credit check. Internet Essentials specifically advertised there would be no credit check.
*The application process took up to 3 months – far too long for clients that are skeptical about the product in the first place and have other pressing demands on their budget.
*Initial Internet Essentials customer service representatives suggested that Internet Essentials clients could pay $150 deposit to avoid a credit check.
*Families were charged $50 by the technicians that installed their modem, even though Internet Essentials guarantees free installation.

Through advocacy with Comcast and the actions of regional staff, these issues have been addressed by Comcast. However, MEDA is concerned that these issues have prevented eligible and needy families from fully taking advantage of this benefit. Due to these early barriers MEDA believes Comcast should extend the Internet Essentials program until 2017.

Comcast increase support of community-based programs. If it weren't for community-based organizations helping clients learn about and subscribe to Internet Essentials, Comcast wouldn't even have the 8% penetration it is currently reporting among eligible families. These organizations also provide critical ongoing support to subscribers, including digital literacy training. At MEDA, we spend significant resources on these support activities. We would welcome additional commitments by Comcast to help fund essential programs like these.

Comcast expand the program to include low-income individuals. Even as government and other social services are more exclusively available online, the clients they are meant to serve adopt high-speed home Internet at significantly lower rates than other populations. Low-income households, people with disabilities and seniors are among the most vulnerable we serve, and an affordable Internet connection would significantly improve their access to vital services and the quality of their lives.

Elected officials and policymakers should know that while Comcast has made improvements to its discounted broadband offer, the company should offer Internet Essentials beyond June 2014 and expand eligibility as described above if it desires to truly play a leadership role in closing the Digital Divide and achievement gap in our state.

Respectfully,

Luis Granados