



RHODE ISLAND
Executive Office of Commerce
317 Iron Horse Way, Suite 203
Providence, Rhode Island 02908

January 24, 2024

Representative Jacquelyn M. Baginski
Chair, House Innovation, Internet and Technology Committee
State House
Providence, RI 02903

RE: HB 7157 – Broadband Deployment and Investment Act

Dear Chair Baginski,

I write to offer comments on House bill 7157, an Act Relating to Public Utilities and Carriers – Broadband Deployment and Investment Act.

This bill would create a broadband community outreach coordinator position within the Division of Public Utilities to assist state residents in accessing the federal Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP). The ACP provides eligible households with a \$30 per month subsidy for their internet bill and a one-time benefit of up to \$100 off an eligible device.

The Rhode Island Commerce Corporation (Corporation) has worked diligently to support ACP outreach and awareness, including securing funding for and hiring a community outreach coordinator in early 2023. Through this coordinator, the Corporation has co-hosted scores of awareness and enrollment events. Presently, 47 percent of eligible households in Rhode Island are enrolled in the ACP, which is the highest percentage enrollment among New England states and above the national average.^[1] There are about 81,000 Rhode Island households currently enrolled in the ACP.

However, the agency that administers the ACP, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), projects that the program will run out of funds in April 2024. Further, the FCC has announced that it will stop accepting ACP applications and enrollments on February 7, 2024. There is a bipartisan bill before Congress, and supported by Senator Whitehouse, that would extend the ACP by one year. It is important to note that without an extension of the ACP, the 81,000 Rhode Islanders that rely on ACP for affordable broadband service will see a \$30 increase in their monthly bill.

In short, we fully support efforts to conduct outreach and want to ensure you have the latest information on the funding received by Commerce to employ an outreach coordinator and our efforts to conduct outreach around the ACP.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Elizabeth M. Tanner".

Elizabeth M. Tanner, Esq.
Secretary of Commerce

CC. Honorable Members of the House Committee on Innovation, Internet and Technology
Representative John J. Lombardi
Dawn Huntley, Committee Clerk
Nicole McCarty, Chief Legal Counsel

^[1] [Education SuperHighway Affordable Connectivity Program Enrollment Dashboard](#), accessed Jan. 23, 2024.