

# 2021 – CLOSING THE HOMEWORK GAP TOGETHER

One thing we all learned last year was the power of connection – the critical need to stay digitally connected to our work, school, family and friends. It was a year that accelerated the move to digital, changing permanently how we communicate, learn and work. Sadly, **nearly 17 million children** across America are disconnected from online learning because internet access wasn't available or affordable. No child should get left on the wrong side of the digital divide.

To address this challenge, throughout 2020, AT&T has taken action to support students, families and educators by providing connected devices and hotspots for K-12 schools and colleges and universities across the country.

Backed by one of the largest private full-time union workforces in the country (and the only unionized wireless provider), no other public company in America has invested more in American infrastructure in the past five years. Through our **\$125 billion investment in U.S. wired and wireless networks**, we are working to get more Americans connected. The last year has shown us all, however, we cannot do it alone. As we scale our investments in robust broadband networks there is more we can do together.

Here are four specific things Congress and the Administration can do to meet the goal of bringing high-speed broadband to every American family:

- 1 We need to identify where broadband is unavailable with geographic precision.**  
In December, Congress appropriated \$65 million for the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to implement more accurate broadband mapping. In the wake of the FCC's recent successful \$9B initiative to fund rural broadband deployment (known as the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) Phase I auction) – and with more than \$11B set aside for the next phase of that effort – better maps are the next critical step. Accurate maps will allow us to precisely target subsidy dollars to close any remaining rural broadband gaps.
- 2 It is time to modernize and digitize the Lifeline program.**  
Government assistance programs, like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), allow participants to seamlessly receive benefits and make payments electronically via an electronic card system. The Lifeline program should do the same. To be effective, the Lifeline subsidy needs to be updated to support the full cost of broadband connectivity.
- 3 We should give equal weight to wired and wireless solutions.**  
With wireless technologies offering greater performance, wireless broadband solutions are increasingly preferred to close both affordability and availability gaps. Proposed solutions should therefore continue to support connectivity goals in a technology-neutral manner so long as they can meet defined performance criteria. Being overly prescriptive on technology solutions could result in some homes being on the wrong side of the digital divide.
- 4 The government should enact a policy framework that incorporates sustainable funding mechanisms.**  
The government must act to make essential broadband support sustainable. Lifeline funding, in particular, must be put on more stable footing. In lieu of placing a tax on an ever-shrinking base of traditional interstate voice services, we have advocated for direct Congressional appropriations to meet the growing broadband affordability needs.

By working together, we can bridge the digital divide and connect our country to fuel innovation and create a better future for every American. Companies like ours are ready to partner with the Administration, Congress and the FCC. It's time to move forward and grow a stronger, more connected economy with broadband policies that reflect the digital age.