

U.S. Sen. Baldwin: Joins colleagues to introduce bill to expand emergency broadband benefit access

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) today joined more than a dozen of her Senate Democratic colleagues, led by Senator Ron Wyden (D-OR), to introduce new legislation building on the [Emergency Broadband Connections Act](#) to ensure working families can stay online through the current economic and health crisis.

“Reliable high-speed broadband is necessary for our small businesses and rural communities to get through the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic,” **said Senator Baldwin.** “This legislation will help ensure that working families and students across Wisconsin have access to broadband no matter where they live and are not left behind as we work to build back better and move our economy forward.”

The new legislation would authorize an additional \$6 billion for the Emergency Broadband Benefit program, to accommodate high demand during the COVID-19 pandemic. That program provides \$50 per month benefit to workers who have been laid off or furloughed during the pandemic and \$75 per month on Tribal lands, along with a range of other assistance to ensure families can access critical online services. Broadband connections are essential for Americans seeking to get new jobs, and to access school, health care and other government services.

The bill also speeds up benefit approvals by providing funding to help states participate in the National Lifeline Eligibility verifier and requiring the Federal Communications Commission to coordinate with the U.S. Department of Agriculture to set up automated connections between the National Lifeline Eligibility Verifier and the National Accuracy Clearinghouse for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

In addition to Baldwin and Wyden, Senators Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Edward Markey (D-MA), Richard Durbin (D-IL), Raphael Warnock (D-GA), Cory Booker (D-NJ), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Robert Menendez (D-NJ), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) and Patty Murray (D-WA) also sponsored the new legislation.

The bill is endorsed by a broad coalition of consumer advocacy, civil rights, and industry groups, including: ACLU, the National Consumer Law Center, Public Knowledge, Engine, Schools, Health & Libraries Broadband (SHLB) Coalition, National Hispanic Media Coalition, Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition, Asian Americans Advancing Justice and the National Council on Aging.

Emily Chi, Assistant Director of Telecom, Tech, and Media Diversity, Asian Americans Advancing Justice: “AAJC strongly supports the Enhanced Emergency Broadband Act. Bridging the digital divide is critical to supporting the well-being of AAPIs and other BIPOC communities. We must ensure all of our communities have access to affordable and reliable internet so that they have the essential services, connections, and opportunities that they need to thrive.”

Ramsey Alwin, President and CEO, National Council on Aging: “The COVID-19 pandemic has shined a bright spotlight on the unacceptable inequities around digital access in the United States. While older adults with high-speed internet access benefited from telehealth and food delivery during the pandemic,

those without broadband suffered. Too many older adults face multiple barriers ranging from digital literacy to affordable, accessible devices and broadband. The Enhanced Emergency Broadband Act would help Americans, particularly those with low-incomes, by expanding the availability of the Emergency Broadband Benefit and making long-overdue improvements to streamline access for the related Lifeline Program.”

Tyson Bertone-Riggs, Policy Analyst, Rural Voices for Conservation

Coalition: “The Emergency Broadband Benefit can provide vital assistance to those in need of essential broadband services, including many in rural communities. The Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition is excited to see this legislation which would help increase funding for the important EBB program and allow it to better serve rural communities and others. The importance of this program has been made all the more clear as the pandemic has highlighted the need for internet connectivity for access to health services, education, and connection with family and friends.”

Kate Tumarello, Executive Director, Engine: “We’re grateful for the introduction of the Enhanced Emergency Broadband Act, which will help narrow the nation’s digital divide. Increasing connectivity will boost opportunities for using and creating innovative services and tools online, and it will help ensure that entrepreneurs of all backgrounds have access to the reliable Internet access they need to launch new companies.”

An online version of this release is available [here](#).