

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 17, 2009

The Honorable Lawrence E. Strickling
Assistant Secretary for Communications and Information
Administrator
National Telecommunications and Information Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave. NW
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Assistant Secretary Strickling,

We were pleased that you discussed the importance of “anchor institutions” to nationwide broadband rollout during the oversight hearing on September 10, 2009 before the House Subcommittee on Communications, Technology and the Internet. Anchor institutions are essential to providing broadband access to unserved and underserved populations unable to maintain computer service in individual homes because of financial or technological impediments. They also provide essential educational and medical services to millions of Americans each day.

In fact, Congress clearly recognized that anchor institutions represent our best hope of reaching large numbers of people simultaneously and increasing the value of our overall investment. The *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)* specifically identifies anchor institutions as a core component of America’s nationwide broadband rollout. In particular, Section 6001(b)(3) states that one of the five purposes of the BTOP program is to:

(3) provide broadband education, awareness, training, access, equipment, and support to –
(A) schools, libraries, medical and healthcare providers, community colleges and other institutions of higher education, and other community support organizations and entities to facilitate greater use of broadband service by or through these organizations.

These institutions require very high-capacity broadband connections – 100 Megabits to 1 Gigabit and higher – to provide distance learning, remote medical imaging, on-line job training, and many other critical services. Building high-capacity broadband pipes will have transformative impact on local communities. It will create jobs through the deployment of these technologies, allow our school children to obtain a better education deliver of high-quality health care at a lower cost, improve job-training centers at community colleges and libraries, and enhance public safety. Bringing high-capacity broadband to a neighborhood school or library will also make it much easier to ultimately serve the residential users and businesses in those neighborhoods.

Unfortunately, it has come to our attention that many of these community anchor institutions do not fit within the categories established by the BTOP application rules. The application rules also adopt a definition of broadband that falls far short of the kind of high-capacity broadband needed by these institutions. As a result, many community anchor institutions did not even apply for broadband funding,

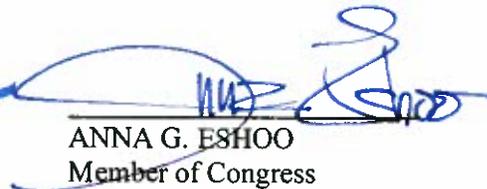
and those that did apply noted that they found the application process to be confusing, complicated and discouraging.

Although you indicated that 768 kilobits per second download is the floor and not the ceiling for broadband speeds, we are concerned that some potential applicants believed that there was insufficient incentive for very high speed initiatives. Others indicated that the floor speed allowed slower incumbents to claim that an area was not under or unserved because they already provided service at the lower speeds.

We understand that NTIA will consider making changes to the next round of funding rules. We strongly urge you to consider giving greater priority to funding these high-capacity connections in future funding rounds. We urge that future funding rounds have a specific category and standards that recognize the unique needs of community anchor institutions. These proposals have serious merit and we hope you will give it your full consideration.

Sincerely,


DORIS O. MATSUI
Member of Congress


ANNA G. ESHOO
Member of Congress


EDWARD M. MARKEY
Member of Congress