

January 25, 2021

Ms. Marlene H. Dortch

Office of the Secretary

Federal Communications Commission

45 L Street, N.E.

Washington, DC. 20554

**Re: Docket No. 20-445**

Dear Ms. Dortch:

HelpAge USA is pleased to respond to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Wireline Competition Bureau’s request for public comments on *Emergency Broadband Connectivity Fund Assistance*. HelpAge USA is a global nonprofit organization that advances the well-being and inclusion of older people through research, advocacy, and programs. We focus our efforts on older, low-income, ethnically, and racially diverse adults who are more likely to experience inequities in every aspect of their lives, from healthcare, to technology, to financial services.

The people HelpAge USA serves have suffered disproportionately from COVID-19. According to the World Health Organization, women and men over 60 years of age account for more than 95 percent of all COVID-19 deaths. Older Americans are rightly among the first in line to receive COVID-19 vaccines. But nearly 8 million of them live at or below the poverty level. Consequently, many cannot afford high-speed Internet service. As the federal government and the states roll out the COVID-19 vaccine, information and sign-up forms are largely being provided online. Even when calling for an appointment is an option, it is often only possible to find the number using the [Internet](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/technology/online-sign-ups-complicate-vaccine-rollout-for-older-people/2021/01/15/896bc174-573b-11eb-acc5-92d2819a1ccb_story.html). Thus, as our country has gone virtual, older Americans with no access to reliable, affordable broadband are being left behind.

For these reasons and others, HelpAge USA welcomes the FCC’s Emergency Broadband Benefit program and urges the Commission to prioritize older adults. To ensure that older low-income adults have the right to broadband access, we urge the FCC to take the following actions:

* Prioritize inclusion of eligible low-income adults 60+ years of age and their households and make it as simple as possible for them to receive assistance. The federal government already knows who many of these adults are because they are enrolled in both Medicare and Medicaid. Medicaid recipients are eligible for the Lifeline program.
* Guarantee that the program applies to a wide range of connected devices and associated customer premises equipment, including the monthly rental cost of modems and routers, VPN equipment and VSAT dishes and antennae. In some rural areas, satellite may be one of the few viable options for Internet access.
* Require participating providers to publicize – and take your own steps to promote – the availability of this assistance through community-level organizations that are likely to serve older adults, including senior centers, Meals on Wheels, libraries, churches, food banks, grocery stores, post offices and pharmacies.
* Obligate participating providers to create and maintain programs that assist older people in their adoption of broadband Internet and in the operation and use of connected devices and associated equipment. The FCC could also consider directing resources to other universal service program participants for this purpose.

HelpAge USA appreciates this opportunity to comment. We look forward to working with the FCC and with other organizations to ensure the digital inclusion of older Americans through the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program.

Sincerely,



Cynthia Cox-Roman

Chief Executive Officer