

RIP Affordable Connectivity Program

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Whether a person needs to pay their bills on an online portal, turn in homework online, or simply stream a new television show, access to reliable, high-speed internet has become a necessity. Unfortunately, there is a growing gap between those who have the access and knowledge to safely and effectively use the internet and those who do not. This gap is often referred to as the “digital divide.”¹

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) launched the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) to help close the digital divide in the United States. The program was initially launched in December 2021, in accordance with the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.² The Act provided funding to help lower the cost of internet service, so that more Americans could have access to high-speed internet.³ The program aimed to assist households who met certain criteria, including having an income at or below 200% of the federal poverty guidelines or participation in certain government assistance programs.⁴ Under the ACP, eligible households could apply to receive up to \$30.00 off their monthly internet service or up to \$75.00 off on qualifying tribal land.⁵

In January 2024, the FCC warned ACP-participating households of the possibility of ACP funds running out.⁶ The Biden administration requested funding through December of 2024 but was unsuccessful in its request.⁷ Republican senators were concerned about the FCC’s financial management of the program, deeming much of the Commission’s spending to be wasteful.⁸ On May 31, 2024, the FCC Chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel announced that the ACP would officially end on June 1, 2024 due to lack of funding.⁹

While this is an unfortunate step backwards in closing the digital divide, qualifying low-income households can turn to the Lifeline program for a smaller monthly discount on their

¹ *What Is the Digital Divide?*, NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY, <https://www.ncbroadband.gov/digital-divide/what-digital-divide> [<https://perma.cc/7ARV-YJDX>].

² Press Release, Federal Communications Commission, FCC Launches Affordable Connectivity Program (Dec. 31, 2021), <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DOC-378908A1.pdf>.

³ *Fact Sheet: The Bipartisan Infrastructure Deal*, THE WHITE HOUSE, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/11/06/fact-sheet-the-bipartisan-infrastructure-deal/> [<https://perma.cc/A4FA-8EEE>].

⁴ FCC Launches Affordable Connectivity Program, *supra* note 2 at ¶ 3.

⁵ *Affordable Connectivity Program*, FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION, <https://www.fcc.gov/acp> [<https://perma.cc/M4KF-7AU6>].

⁶ Press Release, Federal Communications Commission, Affordable Connectivity Program to End Soon Barring Congressional Action (Jan. 11, 2024), <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DOC-399712A1.pdf>.

⁷ Jon Brodtkin, *The Affordable Connectivity Program Died—and Thousands of Households Have Already Lost Their Internet*, WIRED (Jul. 30, 2024, 4:36 PM), <https://www.wired.com/story/affordable-care-act-low-income-households-lose-internet/>.

⁸ Press Release, John Thune, Senator, Thune, Cruz, McMorris Rodgers, Lata Raise Serious Concerns About the FCC’s Management of the ACP (December 15, 2023), <https://www.thune.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/press-releases?ID=4EC3DDD6-6718-4C80-A031-C1782ED691D9> [<https://perma.cc/49DR-BLF5>].

⁹ Press Release, Federal Communications Commission, FCC Brings Affordable Connectivity Program to a Close (May 31, 2024), <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DOC-402930A1.pdf>

internet bills.¹⁰ Qualification for the Lifeline program is based on several factors including: having an income that is 135% or less of the Federal Poverty Guidelines; participating in certain federal assistance programs; or being a survivor of domestic violence, human trafficking, or related crimes.¹¹ Participating households receive a monthly discount of up to \$9.25 or a monthly discount of up to \$34.25 on Tribal lands. The Lifeline discount is significantly less than the ACP discount, however it can still help to close the digital divide by easing some of the burden of paying for internet services.

¹⁰ *Get Started*, USAC LIFELINE SUPPORT, <https://www.lifelinesupport.org/get-started/> [https://perma.cc/Y9Y7-J9FQ].

¹¹ *Do I Qualify?*, USAC LIFELINE SUPPORT, <https://www.lifelinesupport.org/do-i-qualify/> [https://perma.cc/6MWQ-TZ88].