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July 19, 2021

Vice President Kamala Harris
Office of the Vice President
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Vice President Kamala Harris,

As Black Religious Leaders across a range of denominations and religions, we continue to pray at this critical time for the Biden Administration team as a whole, and especially for you as Vice President of this country. We are happy you are leading the White House's push to expand broadband access in this country.

We write to let you know we believe now more than ever in the need for a permanent broadband subsidy to help more low-income households connect to home internet service.

Getting everyone in the country connected to high-speed broadband (internet) at home is a civil rights imperative. Internet access opens the door to so many pathways critical to our advancement: educational and economic opportunities, family and church connection, health care services, greater civic engagement, and activism. Unfortunately, only 71% of Black families and 65% of Hispanic families have broadband service at home compared to 81% of white households (Pew studies).

We are pleased that earlier this year Congress authorized the Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) that provides a $50 dollar subsidy and up to a $100 dollar device during the pandemic emergency period. This groundbreaking effort builds on the proven success of private sector adoption programs and public-private partnerships that have connected millions of families through free or discounted service. But the EBB is not a permanent solution.

The Federal Communications Commission reported 2.5 million households have signed up for the EBB since it was launched in May. As a nation, we cannot leave these neighbors hung out to dry when the EBB expires. School-age children, the elderly, and job seeking adults in these households will still need home connectivity even after the pandemic ends. We need a more permanent solution to the issue of making broadband accessible to all.

Black Religious Leaders have played a pivotal role in helping this country live

up to its constitutional creed as it relates to civil rights, human rights, voting rights and economic justice. Our churches and houses of worship have been ground zero during this pandemic, teaching Black families not only how to access prayer and worship online but also how to access voter information and how to navigate remote learning, telehealth services, job searches, e-commerce, and family hook-ups. This is the work of the Black church in the digital era which does not get the attention of the media.

We can end the digital divide once and for all with a permanent subsidy. We have subsidies to feed those who are food insecure. We have subsidies for those who need help with childcare, home energy and other essential needs. We need a similar program for the internet. We now stand ready to help the Biden team mobilize our communities around digital and information literacy. The future of our families and community depends upon it.

To build a more just, equitable, and hopeful future, every member of our community should share in the opportunities of home internet access.

We are hoping you will help lead this effort.

Sincerely,

Rev. Dr. Renita J. Weems
Coalition Leader for Black Churches 4 Broadband
Co-Pastor of Ray of Community Church
https://www.blackchurches4broadband.org/

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