



May 2, 2024

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Senate Appropriations Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Tom Cole
Chair
House Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chris Van Hollen
Chair
Subcommittee on Financial
Services and General Government
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Steve Womack
Chair
Subcommittee on Financial
Services and General Government
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Murray, Chair Van Hollen, Chair Cole, and Chair Womack,

On behalf of The National Domestic Violence Hotline (The Hotline), we write to request robust additional funding for the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) which is on the brink of shutting down due to lack of funding. Access to affordable high-speed internet is not a luxury in 2024. This program is the largest broadband affordability effort in our Nation's history which has successfully allowed more than 23 million households to get — and stay — connected to robust broadband service at home. This includes vulnerable populations such as victims of domestic violence and survivors of other forms of gender-based abuse who are often isolated, experience many forms of economic abuse and depend on seeking critically needed assistance via access to the internet.

For over 27 years, The Hotline has provided vital support for over 7 million victims of abuse through confidential 24-hour, seven days a week, 365 days-a-year toll-free telephone and digital (chat and text) hotline services which offer information and assistance to adult and youth survivors of family violence, domestic violence, or dating violence; their family and household members; and others affected by the violence. In 2023, The Hotline experienced historic high contact volume—928,892 calls, texts, and chats with more than 2,500 incoming contacts per day. This was close to a 20 percent increase from 2022. Now more than ever, survivors of domestic violence need affordable high-speed internet to access support, safety planning and resources to keep them and their children safe.

Financial insecurity is the number one barrier to safety for survivors of intimate partner violence and clearly reflected on the lines. Comparing January 2023 to December 2023 to the same period

in 2022 the Hotline experienced 40% more contacts citing economic and financial abuse as central to their experience of abuse and finances as a barrier to safety. Financial abuse occurs in 99% of all domestic violence.ⁱ Access to programs like ACP can be lifeline.

At the end of last year, the FCC conducted a survey of recipients and unearthed stunning findings.ⁱⁱ Eighty (80) percent of respondents cited affordability as the reason they had inconsistent or no service prior to the ACP.ⁱⁱⁱ More than three-quarters of respondents said that losing the ACP would disrupt their service, up to and including dropping internet service altogether. That means millions of households and survivors of domestic violence across the country could lose their ability to access resources, support and their opportunity to vital services such as those provided by The Hotline.

The ACP represents a huge step forward in closing the digital divide for our nation's most vulnerable populations in urban, rural and Tribal communities. Without additional funding for the program, we stand to backslide on that progress and directly impact the safety of thousands of victims of domestic violence. We cannot let these vulnerable individuals and families lose their vital connections merely because Congress failed to provide critically needed funding to continue this successful program.

Sincerely,

Katie Ray-Jones
CEO

ⁱ Measuring the Effects of Domestic Violence on Women's Financial Well-Being. Adrienne E. Adams, Michigan State University Department of Psychology. CFS Research Brief 2011-5.6.

ⁱⁱ Federal Communications Commission, ACP Consumer Survey (Feb. 29, 2024), <https://www.fcc.gov/acp-survey>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Federal Communications Commission, ACP- Measuring Impact (Feb. 29, 2024), <https://www.fcc.gov/sites/default/files/Measuring-Impact-ACP-Survey-Fact-Sheet.pdf>.