



New England Cable & Telecommunications Association, Inc.
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House Committee on Energy & Technology
Vermont State House
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633

Dear Chair Briglin and House Committee on Energy & Technology Members,

On behalf of the New England Cable and Telecommunications Association (NECTA), I appreciate the opportunity to provide information regarding NECTA's member companies' low-cost, high-speed broadband plans offered to Vermont residents. NECTA is a five-state regional trade association representing substantially all private telecommunications companies in Vermont, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Rhode Island. In Vermont our member companies include Comcast and Charter Communications. The networks built and maintained by our companies are future-proof and deliver gigabit speeds to more Vermonters than any other provider.

NECTA members serve 185 Vermont municipalities with broadband, video, voice and home security and automation services. Over the past decade, our members have collectively invested over \$200 million developing state of the art networks in Vermont. Today, we provide high-speed broadband to 155,000 homes and businesses through approximately 9,000 miles of fiber.

Before, during and after the pandemic, NECTA members play a critical role in connecting Vermont residents who face financial, cultural, digital literacy or other complex insecurities or barriers that would otherwise prohibit them from subscribing to the high-speed broadband that runs right down the street on which they live. NECTA member companies are committed to continuing these digital equity efforts and getting more people connected through their low-cost broadband programs. These programs, highlighted below, demonstrate NECTA members' long-standing commitment to providing reliable, high-speed broadband internet with low-cost and subsidized options to make digital equity a reality. Our members continue to educate consumers about broadband adoption and the variety of low-cost options currently available to them as well as provide computing devices and digital literacy training to maximize broadband connectivity. These programs include:

Comcast Internet Essentials

Since 2011, Comcast's [Internet Essentials program](#) has connected more than 10 million low-income Americans to all the opportunities of a digital world through low-cost, high-speed

Internet at home. Comcast partners with local communities to pass on the importance of being connected and provide low-cost Internet service and computers along with free training to unlock online potential.

As the nation's largest broadband adoption program for low-income Americans, Internet Essentials provides low-cost, high-speed Internet to qualified low-income households in Comcast's service area for \$9.95/month, with in-home WiFi, and no contracts or credit checks required. Eligible families who qualify for public assistance programs such as the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), Housing Assistance, Medicaid, SNAP, SSI, and other programs qualify for Internet Essentials. With the low-cost service, Comcast also provides the option to Internet Essentials customers to purchase a low-cost laptop or desktop computer and offers free digital literacy training in various languages for customers who need additional assistance.

Earlier this year, Comcast announced that starting on March 1, 2021, the company would be doubling download speeds to 50mbps and increasing the upload speeds to 5mbps. This is the sixth time in 10 years that Comcast has increased broadband speeds while keeping the cost the same as when it rolled out in 2011. Internet Essentials participants will continue to receive Comcast's most advanced Wi-Fi and security products.

Since the outset of the pandemic, Comcast has also provided 60 days of free access for thousands of low-income families through Internet Essentials. Importantly, on the 10th anniversary of Internet Essentials last month, Comcast announced it would invest \$1 billion over the next 10 years to help further close the digital divide and give even more low-income Americans the tools and resources they need to succeed in an increasingly digital world. It is estimated that these new commitments will impact as many as 50 million Americans over the next 10 years.

Internet Essentials Quick Facts:

- Internet Essentials has been in effect for 10 years in Vermont
- Internet Essentials has connected over 6,900 families or individuals over the last 10 years in the state
- Cost is \$9.95/month with no contracts or credit checks required
- Speeds of 50/5mbps
- Low cost or free computing device, netbook etc. offered as part of the program
- Digital skills training offered with local partners, e.g., Boys & Girls Clubs, other community organizations; also offered in various languages
- Broad eligibility- any individual or family who qualifies for public assistance programs such as the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), Housing Assistance, Medicaid, SNAP, SSI, and other programs qualify for Internet Essentials

Comcast's Internet Essentials Partnership Program

Comcast's [Internet Essentials Partnership Program](#) (IEPP) is designed to help accelerate Internet adoption at a critical time. The program provides the opportunity for school districts and other organizations to contract directly with Comcast to quickly provide high-speed Internet service to large numbers of students and families, at no cost to the individual consumers. The program,

which relies on public-private partnerships, enables entire communities to work together to coordinate funding to help connect K-12 students.

Through IEPP, sponsored families have access to all benefits Internet Essentials has to offer—a high-speed Internet connection at home, the option to purchase a low-cost computer, and access to free digital skills training in person (if safe), online, and in print. IEPP not only enables more families to connect to the Internet at home, it also allows community-based partners to bring their expertise to empower families to take on the challenges of today while preparing for the future.

Comcast's Lift Zones

Established in 2020, Lift Zone from Comcast is a partnership with local community centers and nonprofits nationwide to provide no charge, enterprise-grade, high-capacity Wi-Fi coverage inside safe spaces. “[Lift Zones](#)” are designed to help those students who either do not have Internet service at home, or who do not have a safe or secure environment at home, to get online for distance learning, homework, or other educational activities.

The global pandemic has put many low-income students at risk of being left behind and has accelerated the need for comprehensive digital equity and Internet adoption programs to support them. Lift Zones are intended to help those students who, for a variety of reasons, may be unable to connect to distance learning at home, or who just want another place in which to study.

Spectrum Internet Assist

Established in 2016, [Spectrum Internet Assist](#) is Charter Communications' low-cost broadband program available to eligible low-income households and seniors. For \$17.99/month, Spectrum Internet Assist provides high-speed internet, a free internet modem, no data caps or contracts, and optional in-home Wi-Fi service. This low-cost program is available to households in which one or more members are a recipient of assistance through the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) of the NSLP, or Supplemental Security Income for people ages 65 and up.

Charter Communications' Stay Connected K-12

Last October, Charter announced [Stay Connected K-12](#), a new Spectrum Enterprise solution that enables schools to offer high-speed, cable broadband Internet access direct to their students, educators, and staff in their own homes so learning and teaching are uninterrupted. Participants are not billed for their services.

Stay Connected K-12 combines the robust speeds and rich features of Spectrum's broadband Internet with simplified program management and billing for local school districts through Spectrum Enterprise and is a turnkey solution for their students and educators. Users can enjoy:

- In home Wi-Fi to connect each Wi-Fi enabled device in the residence.

- Unlimited usage with no data caps, providing schools/districts with a consistent cost per user.
- 24/7/365 technical support, relieving schools/districts of the responsibility of technical support for the end-user connections.
- Self-installation kit with modem and router that allows end-users to get connected quickly and easily, with no intervention required from schools/districts.

Stay Connected K-12 also maximizes flexibility for districts, allowing them to add students to the program when needed, with no minimum term commitment on any of the connections.

Charter Community Solutions Bulk Program

With more people working/schooling from home, broadband adoption has become more important than ever. The Community Solutions Bulk Program plays a crucial role in closing the “digital divide” with more affordable broadband access. The program provides high speed Internet service (up to 200 Mbps) in bulk at a reduced cost. It offers residents a significant savings off regular retail pricing which includes a modem, wireless router and one aggregated monthly bill to the municipality or entity. Residents also have ability to upgrade or order additional services outside of the bulk package and would be billed directly for those services.

National Cable Partnership with Leading Education Non-Profit to Expand Connectivity Solutions

In addition to the above individual programs that NECTA members are offering in their service areas to get Vermont residents connected, last September they signed onto the national "[K-12 Bridge to Broadband](#)" initiative to help identify families that need an internet connection by working with school districts. Through this national initiative spearheaded by the National Internet and Television Association (NCTA) and EducationSuperHighway (ESH), a national non-profit leading the work to close the classroom connectivity gap, K-12 Bridge to Broadband Program has established a national framework of principles that enables cable broadband providers to work directly with school districts to 1) confidentially share information to quickly identify students without broadband at home, and 2) enable school districts to purchase internet service for families facing economic insecurity through sponsored service agreements.

FCC’s Emergency Broadband Benefit Program

Lastly, both Comcast and Charter have enrolled to participate in the Federal Communication Commission’s (FCC) Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB)¹, which will provide a discount of up to \$50 per month towards broadband service for eligible households and up to \$75 per month for households on Tribal lands. Eligible households can also receive a one-time discount of up to \$100 to purchase a laptop, desktop computer, or tablet from participating providers if they contribute \$10-\$50 toward the purchase price.

¹ <https://www.fcc.gov/broadbandbenefit>

NECTA member companies remain committed to getting as many Vermont residents connected to high-speed internet as possible, regardless of their financial circumstances. We thank you for your time and review of the above programs, and we are available to answer any questions you might have.

Respectfully,

Timothy O. Wilkerson
President