



December 15, 2022

Chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel
Federal Communications Commission
45 L Street NE
Washington, DC 20554

RE: Affordable Connectivity Program Outreach Grants-- Your Home Your Internet Outreach Pilot,
FCC-ACOGP-23-002

Dear Chairwoman Rosenworcel,

On behalf of [Stewards of Affordable Housing for the Future \(SAHF\)](#), we urge the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) **to immediately clarify that private owners and operators of properties with federal housing assistance programs¹ are eligible applicants** for the Your Home Your Internet (YHYI) pilot program, and **extend the application deadline to allow these eligible applicants an opportunity to apply. Without taking these actions, the BHYI pilot will not only be unable to reach its potential but could actually further digital inequities for and among residents of affordable housing.**

SAHF draws on the experience of our members — twelve exemplary multi-state nonprofits who collectively own, operate, and manage more than 149,000 affordable rental homes for persons of limited economic means in 2,000 properties across the country— to inform our work on broadband access and this request. The digital divide has a profound impact on affordable housing residents, [who are nearly twice as likely to lack high-speed internet connections as the general population.](#) SAHF appreciates the FCC's recognition of the importance of affordable connectivity for federally assisted households. We also appreciate your and Commissioner Starks' support for the BHYI pilot to ease enrollment barriers and ensure federally assisted households can successfully participate in the ACP and help bridge the digital divide in affordable housing communities across the country.

We have engaged FCC on [multiple occasions](#) to explain that the universe of federal housing assistance programs includes not just public housing but also privately owned and operated multifamily properties that utilize programs including Section 8 project-based rental assistance (PBRA), Section 202 Housing for the Elderly, and Section 811 Housing for Persons with Disabilities—serving millions of Americans, including extremely low-income families. These programs were recognized in the FCC's definition of federal housing assistance program in the [Third Notice and Order on the BHYI pilot](#), yet the BHYI [Notice of Funding Opportunity](#) (FCC-ACOGP-23-002) appears to preclude participation by private owners of affordable multifamily housing properties, and therefore the reach of this pilot.

Specifically, the NOFO – released on November 21—appears to limit eligible entities to “state, local, and Tribal housing agencies (including housing authorities). Tenant associations and non-profit and community-based entities *that have a partnership with* [emphasis added] a federal, state, local, or Tribal housing agency participating in the Your Home, Your Internet Pilot may also apply for BHYI funding.” This **language and the focus on having a ‘partnership’ which itself is not defined has created substantial confusion in**

Stewards of Affordable Housing for the Future



the affordable housing industry and despite numerous requests for clarity, there has been no definitive response from the FCC. If “partnership” is interpreted conservatively to mean a new agreement between a Public Housing Agency (PHA) and private owner of multifamily affordable rental housing – including those with PBRA, Section 202 and Section 811 assistance – it could create too high of a hurdle for participation. These agreements take time and aligned priorities to take shape. Given that the NOFO was released on November 21, there has yet to be clear guidance on eligibility, and the end of year holidays are approaching, there is certainly not enough time for development of such partnerships let alone sufficient time to develop and contribute to an application due January 9.

In the FCC’s Third Notice and Order, the FCC references private owners of multifamily housing properties with PBRA, Section 202 and Section 811 as “HUD partners” though. Partnership here is a much broader and casual term that encompasses where private owners have rental assistance contracts with HUD to serve eligible families. Further, that notice makes clear FCC’s intention to make funding available to “government entities *and third-party organizations serving federal housing assistance recipients* [emphasis added]”. We urge the **FCC to make clear, immediately and broadly, that owners and operators of properties with federal housing assistance programs – including PBRA, Section 202, and Section 811 – are eligible entities for the YHYI pilot and may request funding independently.** Partnerships with federal, state, local, and Tribal housing agencies may still be possible but should not be a requirement for this small pilot.

Given the current state of confusion, and the fast-approaching deadline, we also urge the FCC to extend the application deadline to at least February 9. Please feel free to contact Jenna Hampton (jhampton@sahfnet.org), SAHF’s Policy & Program Manager with any questions about our comments above.

Sincerely,

Althea Arnold
Senior Vice President, Policy

cc: FCC Commissioner Geoffrey Starks, FCC Secretary Marlene Dortch, HUD Secretary Marcia Fudge

COLLABORATE. INNOVATE. ACCELERATE.

Stewards of Affordable Housing for the Future