

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Chairman Frank Pallone
*Hearing on “Empowering and Connecting Communities through Digital Equity
and Internet Adoption ”*

January 29, 2020

Today’s hearing focuses on promoting broadband adoption, an issue that affects every one of our districts whether they are urban, suburban, or rural. On this Committee, we have on many occasions discussed gaps in internet access and how to subsidize and incentivize building the infrastructure necessary to ensure that everyone has access to reliable, high-speed, and resilient internet service. But we must also consider the gaps in internet adoption—why people don’t, or can’t, subscribe to internet service when it is available to them.

It is increasingly difficult to participate in today’s economy without internet service, and yet millions of Americans who are wired for internet access aren’t actually connected. The key reason most are not connected is cost.

In New Jersey studies have found that nearly 17 percent of residents have no internet access in their homes. Of the families making \$35,000 per year or less, only half have home internet connections. That means school kids in these households have to find public internet connections or wi-fi to complete schoolwork. And their parents are having to fill out job applications and complete educational courses on smart phones or at libraries. This certainly puts these families at a disadvantage.

Fortunately, there are programs at the state, local and federal level that can provide assistance to people who have trouble affording internet access. But at the federal level we can and must do more.

As we consider how to spend proceeds of future spectrum auctions, it is important that we invest in solutions to address these adoption issues. Members have introduced legislation to begin closing these adoption gaps. I’m hopeful we can work to find a way to make these proposals—or others that might come as a result of this hearing today—bipartisan.

The internet holds incredible promise for the future, but as the technology continues to advance, we must make sure that people are not left behind. That’s the concept of digital equity, and it is one I know we will all stand up for. I look forward to hearing more from our witnesses and to finding bipartisan solutions to these issues.