

Attachment—Additional Questions for the Record

**Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
Hearing on
“Broadband Equity: Addressing Disparities in Access and Affordability”
May 6, 2021**

Mr. Chris Lewis, President and CEO, Public Knowledge

The Honorable G.K. Butterfield (D-NC)

1. I have been very focused on finding new ways to increase broadband access for unserved communities in my district. One idea that I’ve put forth in my bill - the “Expanding Opportunities for Broadband Deployment Act” - is to retire an outdated, burdensome statutory requirement that broadband providers be designated as Eligible Telecommunications Carriers (ETCs) to participate in FCC broadband deployment and adoption programs. My bill, which I will reintroduce soon, is an important step toward increasing broadband competition, speeding up rural deployment, and boosting adoption in low-income communities. Removing counterproductive ETC requirements from the FCC broadband deployment and adoption programs will give low-income families more choices and increase competition and service quality. These are goals we should all be able to embrace in a bipartisan manner. In fact, it’s worth noting that both former FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler, a Democrat, and former Commissioner Mike O’Rielly, a Republican, support my bill.
 - a. The FCC announced that hundreds of providers have been accepted into the Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) program, including many that had not previously participated in the Lifeline program. Do you think that Congress's decision to open that program to providers who have not been designated as "Eligible Telecommunications Carriers" helped bolster participation and expand the options available to consumers?

Answer to 1a. Congress’s decision to open the Emergency Broadband Benefit to non-ETCs did expand provider participation and provide more options to consumers. The Eligible Telecommunications Carrier designation is currently required in order to receive Universal Service funds, and was created to ensure that providers adhere to certain requirements that protect consumers and government funds. However, this designation is an excuse given by many large providers for not offering Lifeline service to low-income consumers. Accordingly, it has also limited consumer choice in the Lifeline marketplace. There are other methods of ensuring that consumers are protected, for example, including consumer safeguards as a condition for receiving funds. If these and other protections are enacted, ETC designations could become superfluous. The Emergency Broadband benefit already has over 1,000 providers participating in

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the program, including many not-ETCs.¹ This makes it more likely that consumers have one or more options for subsidized service where they live and will improve the quality of service customers receive.

¹ *Emergency Broadband Benefit Providers*, Federal Communications Commission, <https://www.fcc.gov/emergency-broadband-benefit-providers>.