

Statement for the Record by Congressman Filemon Vela
The Subcommittee on Communications and Technology of the Committee on
Energy and Commerce's hearing,
"Connecting America: Broadband Solutions to Pandemic Problems."

February 17, 2021

Mr. Chairman,

As your Committee meets today on steps to address the digital divide, I write to highlight the severe and ongoing need for connectivity in urban minority communities and urge your members' full consideration of support for municipal owned networks.

My district is home to successful small businesses, cutting-edge universities, and a strong workforce poised to benefit from fast and reliable internet. However, many of my constituents have been left behind by the broadband market. According to the National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA), the 34th Congressional District of Texas is home to the first, second, and fifth worst connected cities in America. Broadband connectivity is a crucial need for the Rio Grande Valley, and we must work to ensure every home has affordable and accessible internet connectivity.

Unfortunately, many urban areas, especially those with persistent poverty and significant minority populations, continue to be underserved. With the lack of federal funding programs that target underserved urban areas, cities in my district are turning to municipal owned networks. Broadband is no longer a luxury, it is a vital tool for students, hospitals and patients, veterans, and our small businesses. Broadband must be treated as a utility. We must prioritize funding for urban areas, including municipal owned networks, and remove unnecessary barriers that prevent local governments from providing this critical utility to their communities.

While the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, took important steps by establishing the Emergency Broadband Benefit, the Office of Minority Broadband Initiatives, and the Connecting Minority Communities pilot project, we must do more to bring targeted assistance to areas overlooked thus far.

I welcome this chance to participate with the Committee and thank the Chair for your continued commitment to solving this crisis. I look forward to ending the digital divide together.

Sincerely,



Filemon Vela
Member of Congress