

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday, June 14, 2011

CONTACT: MARA LEE

(202) 225-7163

Matsui Introduces Legislation to Ensure All Americans Have Access to Affordable Internet Services

Bill Would Expand USF to Broadband for the Purpose of Spurring Broadband Adoptions Rates in Urban, Rural Communities

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, Congresswoman Doris Matsui (D-CA), a member of the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Communications and Technology, introduced the [Broadband Affordability Act of 2011](#)

, which would help bridge the digital divide by making in-home broadband services more affordable for lower-income American families. Currently, the cost of broadband services is one of the main barriers for millions of U.S. households, limiting their ability to connect to Internet services. In fact, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) estimated in 2010 that 28 million Americans do not subscribe to broadband services because of affordability barriers.

“Income should not hinder the ability of hard-working American families to attain broadband services that have become a necessity, not a luxury in our technologically-driven economy. If you don’t have it, you are simply at a competitive disadvantage,” Matsui said. “To close the digital divide, we must address the affordability of broadband services for lower-income households. Although these households may have some options for broadband access, they are underserved if these options are not affordable. This legislation will ensure all Americans have equal access to affordable broadband services.”

The Matsui legislation directs the FCC to create a Broadband Lifeline Assistance Program in order to help make in-home Internet service more affordable. The proposal is similar to the assistance provided for basic telephone service under the existing Commission’s Lifeline Assistance Program, and like the current Lifeline model, revenue for the Broadband Lifeline Assistance Program would be generated by the providers and not by taxpayers. Upon enactment, Lifeline customers would simply receive a discount on their monthly Internet bill.

“As the FCC moves forward to transition the USF program to broadband, a Lifeline program is a natural fit to further our goal of increased adoption rates across this country,” stated Matsui. “My legislation will help bridge the digital divide by making in-home broadband services a reality for American families in both urban and rural communities.”

In today’s economy, Internet use has become an essential tool for those seeking employment, applying for college, communicating with friends and family, and accessing information important for public safety, health, and more.

Matsui added, “We never know where the next big idea is going to come from. But if we don’t support innovation, foster creativity, and embrace the opportunities that technology provides, it will be harder for our nation to compete in global marketplace. We must continue to eliminate barriers that prevent Americans from participating in the digital age.”

Matsui introduced similar legislation in the 111th Congress, and the proposal was later included in the FCC’s National Broadband Plan. A copy of the legislation introduced Tuesday is available [HERE](#) .

Key Provisions of Matsui’s Broadband Affordability Act of 2011:

- The bill directs the FCC to establish a broadband Lifeline Assistance program that provides low-income Americans living in rural and urban areas with assistance in subscribing to affordable broadband service.
- The proposal would also require the FCC, in calculating the amount of support, to routinely study the prevailing market price for service and the prevailing speed adopted by consumers of broadband service.
- The bill is technology neutral to promote competition from broadband service providers under the program.
- Directs the FCC to use the same eligibility criteria used under the Lifeline telephone service program for income eligible households to ensure internet service is available and affordable for eligible low-income households.
- To be eligible for the program, a household must meet federal low-income guidelines or qualify for one of a handful of social service programs, including food stamps, school lunch, or Medicaid.
- Each eligible household will be limited to one broadband lifeline assistance subsidy under the legislation.

#