

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wednesday, April 29, 2009

CONTACT: Alexis Marks or Mara Lee
(202) 225-7163

Rep. Matsui Calls for Additional Broadband Funding in Underserved Urban Areas

House CTI Members Send Letter to Administration to Ensure Consideration of Underserved Urban Areas

Washington, D.C. - Today, Congresswoman Doris Matsui (D-CA) sent a letter to government agencies with oversight over the broadband stimulus grant program to ensure that underserved urban areas are not overlooked and are properly considered during the broadband grant process. Rep. Matsui also encouraged the agencies to fund affordable broadband internet service in urban areas, particularly in underserved urban areas.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), which was signed into law by President Obama in February and supported by Congresswoman Matsui, includes provisions that will expand broadband internet access and help link more Americans to the global economy. By including these provisions, the ARRA and its supporters recognize the important role that broadband can play in stimulating the economy.

Rep. Matsui initiated the letter sent today to the Federal Communications Commission, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), and the U.S. Department of Agriculture to reiterate and reinstate the need for urban communities to be fairly considered in the grant process. These agencies are each responsible for administering the broadband grant process under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA).

The letter underscored this concern, stating, "While there is a strong focus in the ARRA on rural areas, we want to ensure that underserved urban areas are properly considered during the broadband grant process. Specifically, we request that low-income urban populations be considered as potentially underserved populations when you and your agencies develop the broadband grant programs and finalize the requirements for these programs."

According to a July 2008 study by the PEW Internet and American Life Project, about 55% of all adult Americans have a high-speed internet connection at home. This number is up significantly from 47% in 2007. However, among low-income Americans broadband adoption actually declined while at the same time nearly one-third of broadband users paid more to get faster connections. Only 25% of low-income Americans, those whose household incomes are \$20,000 annually or less, reported having broadband at home in April 2008, down from 28% a year prior.

“To fully close the digital divide we must address the affordability of broadband for many low-income families,” the letter sent today continues. “Although these families may have several different options for broadband access, they are underserved if none of these options are affordable. It is our hope that the grant programs will address this population to ensure that all Americans have the chance to benefit from ubiquitous broadband services.”

Joining Representative Matsui in signing the letter are Representatives Edward Markey (D-MA), Bobby Rush (D-IL), Michael Doyle (D-PA), Diana DeGette (D-CO), Kathy Castor (D-FL), and Donna Christensen (D-V.I.). All of which are Members of the Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Communications, Technology, and the Internet.

###