

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 19, 2018

The Honorable Susan Collins  
Chairwoman  
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Transportation, Housing and Urban  
Development, and Related Agencies  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jack Reed  
Ranking Member  
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Transportation, Housing and Urban  
Development, and Related Agencies  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairwoman Collins and Ranking Member Reed,

As your subcommittee begins its work on developing the Fiscal Year 2019 budget for the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), we respectfully request that you fund the ConnectHome Initiative at \$5 million, a level consistent with department's Fiscal Year 2017 request and \$5 million below the department's Fiscal Year 2019 request. Support for the ConnectHome Initiative is crucial to help narrow the digital divide facing low-income students and families by increasing broadband access and adoption for the most at-need communities.

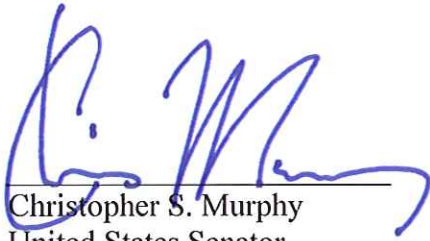
High-speed broadband technology is essential to navigate today's world. Around 90 percent of college applications are submitted online, and more than 80 percent of job openings with Fortune 500 companies are posted on the Internet. However, the Census Bureau has estimated that a staggering one out of every four American households lacks high-speed Internet at home, creating a stark digital divide between populations and accelerating inequality among demographic groups. Americans earning less than \$25,000 per year, individuals without high school degrees, and communities of color are disproportionately impacted by this divide.

To combat this problem, in July 2015, HUD launched the ConnectHome pilot program. Leveraging public-private partnerships, ConnectHome convenes nonprofits, businesses, and Internet service providers to offer high-speed Internet service, devices, technical training, and digital literacy programs to residents of HUD assisted housing in 28 pilot communities, including the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. Facilitating broadband adoption fits squarely within HUD's mission of helping Americans secure quality housing while providing them with the opportunity build a better future.


While broadband expansion is a priority of many members of this body, there is currently no funding for this program. Despite the lack of funding, ConnectHome has helped communities, like New Haven and Meriden, Connecticut, connect with local resources and national companies, like Best Buy, GitHub, and Cox Communication, that have trained residents in digital literacy and have provided them with low-cost Internet service. The \$5 million request would allow for a competitive grants program that would increase broadband access and adoption. These grants would be used to hire and train program coordinators who will connect communities with the resources necessary to narrow the digital divide. The program coordinators would serve as a link between Public Housing Authorities, Internet Service Providers, and federal, state, and local partners. Without this modest funding, we fear that the promising pilot program will not realize its full potential as a significant change agent for these at-risk communities.

Thank you for your consideration of this important request.

Sincerely,



Christopher S. Murphy  
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator