

# Experts, community groups & internet providers urge FCC to free up rural communities to receive broadband subsidies

*Hundreds of communities risk exclusion from the Broadband Equity Access and Deployment (BEAD) program due to previous subsidies for networks that won't be built*

WASHINGTON, DC, UNITED STATES, February 28, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A broad and diverse



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*Gigi Sohn, American Association for Public Broadband*

coalition of nearly 70 broadband experts, internet service providers (ISPs), community leaders, and nonprofits have written to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) with a request to grant a limited amnesty designed to prevent the exclusion of America's least connected rural communities from upcoming federal broadband subsidies.

Under the rules of the Broadband Equity Access and Deployment (BEAD) program, communities that are already covered by grants awarded under programs like the Rural Digital Opportunities Fund (RDOF) and Connect

America Fund II (CAF II) are not eligible to receive BEAD funding.

However, with a large number of RDOF projects projected to default, many of the least connected communities in the US risk being left without the financial support they need to bring critical connectivity to residents and businesses.

To address this, the letter asks that the FCC create a limited-time mechanism allowing ISPs who can not — or will not — fulfill their obligations under the RDOF or CAF II programs to relinquish their grants with a reduced penalty. The goal is to incentivize ISPs to release their funding areas now so that these communities are eligible for BEAD funding and do not miss out on America's largest-ever broadband infrastructure expansion program.

If, without such an amnesty, projects default in future years, the areas those grants are designed to serve will be too late to apply for BEAD funding and these communities will continue to struggle without the digital services necessary to thrive in the 21st century.

Kelty Garbee, Executive Director of Texas Rural Funders, said: “A brief, targeted amnesty period is something communities and broadband providers agree on. It will help ensure that hundreds of disconnected communities across rural America aren’t excluded from the opportunity to receive reliable and affordable internet due to circumstances beyond their control.”

Gigi Sohn, Executive Director of the American Association for Public Broadband (AAPB), said: “The FCC has the power, and the duty, to ensure that no community is left behind simply because an RDOF or CAF II awardee cannot or will not build a network. A brief amnesty period that would allow awardees to default with reduced penalties would help fulfill Congress’ and the Commission’s goal of connecting every US household with robust, affordable broadband. The agency should act urgently to address this challenge and ensure that rural America receives the benefit of Congress’ historic investment in broadband.”

Quinn Jordan, Executive Director of the Mississippi Broadband Association, said: “This amnesty request is not a free pass but an incentive for ISPs to release some RDOF areas across the US without feeling the full weight of the FCC. If a negotiated RDOF release is the difference between a household being afforded access to broadband services through other federal funding sources or quite possibly being left out in the digital dark, I think we owe it to our neighbors to at least try!”

The letter is available at: <https://connecthumanity.fund/rdof-amnesty/>

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