

02 June 2023

Honorable Kay Ivey
Governor of Alabama
State Capitol
600 Dexter Avenue
Montgomery, Alabama 36106

RE: Letter of Support for Student Freedom Initiative's Digital Equity Community Plans

Dear Governor Ivey,

I write to highlight an issue of interest as the state develops broadband execution plans for federal funding allocated under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). As such, I encourage you to include the Community Plans developed by the Student Freedom Initiative in the overall Digital Equity Plans that will provide by our state to the U.S. Department of Education.

To that end, I understand that in the calendar year 2022, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) issued a Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for the \$42.45 billion Broadband, Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program to deploy those resources effectively. I also understand that by 30 Jun 2023, the Biden Administration will announce state allocations based on broadband unserved and underserved maps, and the 180-day calendar starts.

There is no disagreement that broadband is essential to modern life and a requirement for national security, economic growth, education, health care, and public safety. Maximizing broadband coverage, affordability, and meaningful use is imperative for national and individual success. Likewise, without broadband access, these unserved or underserved communities could be left behind in today's information-driven economy. By connecting all our communities, we are reconnecting Americans with one another and helping ensure everyone can contribute and benefit from a growing economy.

I received a brief on a private sector proposal to address the strategic planning needs of the unserved and underserved communities hosting the HBCUs in our district. Without a focused effort that views the planning needs of these institutions and communities as an entire enterprise, we could find ourselves with good intentions but potentially missed opportunities. For example, from discussions with community leaders, industry experts, and administrators at these institutions, I understand there may be gaps in expertise to develop comprehensive plans that will most effectively support the state application process.

The proposal I received would allow the communities to develop plans (e.g., activities, schedule, dependencies, risks, risk mitigation strategies, opportunities, and resources) using a multi-functional team of experts to aid the community in developing connectivity plans. In the completed model, the plans reflected the needs of community stakeholders, provided a

vendor-agnostic approach, and included essential information supporting a quality data-driven analysis. The resulting plan will (1) provide affordable, reliable, high-speed digital access for residents across the service area, (2) create a long-term (50+ year) solution, and (3) recognize the value of HBCUs by assuring that any digital access investment leverages the local value they offer as a community anchor institution. The expertise required to build an effective community plan includes public planning, data analysis, telecom, internet infrastructure, finance, program management, and many other skills. The need for a community plan is also well placed as the NTIA requires evidence of community input before approving funds distribution to the state. The community plan ensures that community input is completed and well-documented.

I was also pleased to hear that the Student Freedom Initiative will use philanthropy to develop plans for 5 Alabama communities anchored by Historically Black Colleges and Universities. The five schools are:

1. Lawson State Community College, Birmingham Alabama
2. Miles College, Birmingham Alabama
3. Selma University, Selma Alabama
4. Stillman College, Tuscaloosa Alabama
5. Tuskegee University, Tuskegee Alabama

The Student Freedom Initiative has also agreed to provide grant writing support to all of these communities for support in areas such as digital literacy, digital access, affordability, and addressing the goal of having at least one digital device in each home in the community.

I found the public-private relationship to be a novel concept worthy of merit. As such, I encourage you to include the Community Plans developed by the Student Freedom Initiative in the overall Digital Equity Plans that will provide by our state to the U.S. Department of Education. Again, I encourage you to examine the approach to aid the planning process for these unserved and underserved communities hosting the HBCUs.

Sincerely,



Anthony Daniels
Minority Leader, Alabama House of Representatives

cc: Kenneth W. Boswell, Director
Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs

Maureen Neighbors, Chief
ADECA, Digital Expansion Division