June 24, 2005

United States Senate
141 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

The Senate Appropriations Committee will soon act on H.R. 2862, legislation to fund the Department of Commerce and related agencies during Fiscal Year 2006. As the full Senate takes up this bill, the undersigned groups respectfully request your support for the restoration of funding for the Technology Opportunities Program (“TOP”), which is administered by the Commerce Department’s National Telecommunications and Information Administration (“NTIA”). If this federal grant initiative were to be permanently eliminated, this would be a serious blow to our nation’s communities as they struggle to achieve access to advanced telecommunications capability.

While the Administration’s FY 2006 Budget again recommends that TOP not be funded, and the House version of H.R. 2862 contains no funds for this program, the funding legislation reported by the Commerce, Justice, Science Subcommittee earlier this week does include $15 million dollars for the TOP program. We strongly urge the Senate to support this level of funding in the final spending bill, as few programs can match the TOP model for enhancing public safety, overcoming digital inequities, and providing opportunities for communities to use technology as a means for social and economic growth. Indeed, it is difficult to see how the Administration’s goal of achieving affordable access to broadband by 2007 can be achieved if this cost-effective and productive program is not reinvigorated through the efforts of the Senate.

The most recent round of projects funded by TOP illustrates the importance of this grant program. Important community needs that FY 2004 grantees are addressing include:

- Job training using WiFi and WiMax technologies
- Broadband video conferencing for tribal telemedicine
- Sensors and wireless broadband for fire detection in the California wilderness
- IP-based video phones for language translations in hospital emergency rooms
- Broadband and sensors for remote in-home monitoring of senior citizens
- Broadband over power lines for remote in-home monitoring of children with asthma
- Web-based training for emergency first responders
• Broadband for minority and women-owned e-commerce businesses
• WiFi connections for rural citizens with local governments
• Internet-2 telehealth services for people with developmental disabilities
• Computer simulations to manage urban evacuations
• Research on emergency location identification for IP phones
• Transmission of high resolutions images of burn victims

No other government program provides the competitive matching grants that serve as an incentive to encourage the use of broadband technologies in the public and non-profit sectors. Furthermore, the private sector has recognized the value of TOP, and companies that provided matching support in FY 2004 included Convio, Wavelength, KNS Communications, Microsoft, Cisco, Nortel, AT&T, SBC and Ambient Control.

In short, TOP’s mission of promoting the widespread availability of advanced telecommunications and information technology is far from complete, and the undersigned groups ask that you and your colleagues support the comparatively small amount of funding needed to continue this vital program.

Thank you for your consideration of our views.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Public Technology
Communications Workers of America
CTCNet
EDUCAUSE
EPIE Institute
Latino Education Project
LINCT Coalition
Medical College of Georgia
National Association of the Deaf
Technology For All
Telecommunications for the Deaf, Inc.
Telecommunications Industry Association
The Arc of the United States
United Cerebral Palsy
Zeum