



September 3, 2025

Sally Burchfield Doty  
Director  
Mississippi Office of Broadband Expansion and Accessibility (BEAM)  
550 High Street  
Sillers Building, 18th Floor  
Jackson, MS 39201  
601-359-5029

**Re: Public Comment on Draft Final Proposal – Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program**

Dear Director Doty,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on Mississippi's Draft Final Proposal for the BEAD program. We appreciate the state's efforts to expand broadband access and close the digital divide, and we recognize that BEAM is adhering to recent federal rule changes. At the same time, there are areas where additional attention is needed to ensure these efforts truly succeed.

One area of concern is the process for gathering public input. With only seven days and over the Labor Day weekend, many communities have not had sufficient time to review and respond to such an important proposal. This limited window raises serious questions about the state's commitment to meaningful community engagement and the extent to which public comments will be carefully read and incorporated into the final plan. Likewise, the removal of community anchor institutions from the final draft proposal is disappointing, as schools, health centers, and libraries are essential to ensuring broadband investments serve whole communities. Even with the shortened timeline and compressed federal schedule, BEAM must still protect the quality of these investments and assure dollars are spent in the coverage areas where they are most needed.

While these issues require stronger attention, we also acknowledge positive elements of the proposal that would move Mississippi's expansion of broadband access in the right direction. Namely, we recognize and support BEAM's emphasis on fiber as the most durable and scalable technology, which will help prevent communities from being left with slower, less reliable options.



Affordability, however, remains uncertain. While the proposal certifies that all subgrantees will be required to offer a low-cost broadband option for the 10-year federal interest period, it does not define what “low-cost” will mean for Mississippi families. We urge BEAM to establish a clear affordability standard and make these options available for public review. Strong oversight, paired with an enforcement mechanism and ongoing monitoring, will be essential to ensure that providers follow through and that households receive the promised service. Because these networks are being built with grant dollars that internet service providers (ISP) will not have to repay, it is especially important that families see real, affordable benefits.

To further strengthen implementation and accountability, BEAM should encourage ISPs receiving grants to engage local residents, especially in rural areas and communities of color, in shaping the execution of these projects, and make information about their designated coverage areas publicly accessible. BEAM should also promote the use of local workers, ensure fair wages, and partner with the state to expand training programs so that broadband investments also strengthen Mississippi’s workforce in areas with limited job opportunities. To build transparency, BEAM should publish regular, plain-language updates on the buildout’s progress and closely monitor projects to ensure funds are spent appropriately and all communities designated in the bids receive the promised service.

Equity in deployment must also be a central priority. As broadband rollout progresses across the state, BEAM should ensure that all communities, regardless of population density or income level, receive timely access to quality, affordable service. To support this, BEAM should set clear benchmarks that require ISPs to build equitably across all communities, publish transparent county-level maps specifying where service will be deployed, so families, communities, local governments, businesses, and other institutions can see whether their individual sites are covered, and monitor progress to guarantee that no community is left behind. An enforcement mechanism will be critical to ensure providers meet these commitments.

Broadband is essential for education, work, health care, and civic life. It is also the foundation for how governments will increasingly communicate with citizens. BEAM’s decisions will shape Mississippi’s digital future for decades. With this \$1.2 billion investment, Mississippi has a historic opportunity to guarantee affordable, reliable, and equitable broadband service for all.

We remain committed to working with communities across the state to support BEAM’s implementation of the BEAD program, monitor the execution of these bids, and to ensure that



every household benefits from this investment. Should you have any questions or concerns regarding this public comment, please contact me via email at [oftizgerald@childrensdefense.org](mailto:oftizgerald@childrensdefense.org).

Sincerely,

*Oleta Garrett Fitzgerald*

Regional Director, Children's Defense Fund–Southern Regional Office  
Convener of the Southern Rural Black Women's Initiative

*Kyra Roby*

Consultant