

September 5, 2014

The Honorable Harry Reid
Senate Majority Leader
United States Senate
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Minority Leader
United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Re.: Moratorium on Internet Taxes

Dear Majority Leader Reid and Minority Leader McConnell:

On behalf of the undersigned Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) organizations, we write to express our support for the Internet Tax Freedom Act (ITFA) and urge you to ensure the moratorium on taxes on Internet access does not expire on November 1, 2014.

Passed in 1998 with bipartisan support, the ITFA has allowed many in our communities to enjoy the benefits of Internet access without the added cost of state and local taxes. Although broadband Internet adoption rates have increased significantly since then, approximately 100 million Americans do not have broadband Internet at home, including minority, low-income, senior, and other vulnerable communities.

According to the NTIA, 28 percent of households who are not online cite the cost of Internet service as the main reason for not being online, and for low-income families who once but are no longer online, cost is the main reason for not going online.¹ We should focus on addressing barriers to Internet adoption, such as digital skills training and increased awareness of the benefits of broadband, instead of increasing barriers to adoption through new Internet access taxes which would occur if ITFA expires.

Although Asian Americans have the highest rate of broadband adoption, the data mask vast differences in socioeconomic statuses within the AAPI community.² For example, a newly released Department of Labor report shows that AAPIs have above-average poverty levels when measured by a supplemental poverty measure (SPM) and the second highest share of long-term unemployed workers after African Americans.³

Internet access greatly benefits the AAPI community. The Internet levels the playing field for free speech, including for small and marginalized communities, empowers our

¹ NTIA, Exploring the Digital Nation: America's Emerging Online Experience 38-40 (2013).

² See Asian Pacific American Legal Ctr. & Asian American Justice Ctr., *A Community of Contrasts: Asian Americans in the United States 2011* (2011) (hereinafter *A Community of Contrasts*). For example, in 2007-2009 approximately 13% of Hmong, 7% of Cambodian, and 6% of Laotian American and Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander households accessed cash public assistance, compared to 5% of African American and 4% of Latino households.

³ Dept. of Labor, *The Economic Status of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the Wake of the Great Recession* 8, 11-12 (2014).

community to organize politically and promote civic engagement, enables limited English proficient individuals to access critical information and services,⁴ creates opportunities for online education, especially for English language learners, supports the production and distribution of diverse content that meets the diverse cultural and linguistic needs of our community, and lowers competitive barriers for small entrepreneurs to compete in the global marketplace.

Please act to ensure the Internet Tax Freedom Act does not expire before the November 1, 2014 deadline so that all Americans can have a chance at benefiting from being connected to the Internet.

Sincerely,

Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC

American Citizens for Justice/Asian American Center for Justice

Asian American Federation of Florida

The Center for Asian Pacific American Women

Japanese American Citizens League

National Asian Pacific American Families Against Substance Abuse

National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Alliance

OCA – Asian Pacific American Advocates

OCA – South Florida Chapter

United Chinese Association of Florida

⁴ See *A Community of Contrasts* at 27-29. Language access is a particularly important issue for the Asian American community given roughly one-third are LEP. One in five Asian American households also live in linguistically isolated households, meaning all household members 14 years old and up speak English less than “very well.”