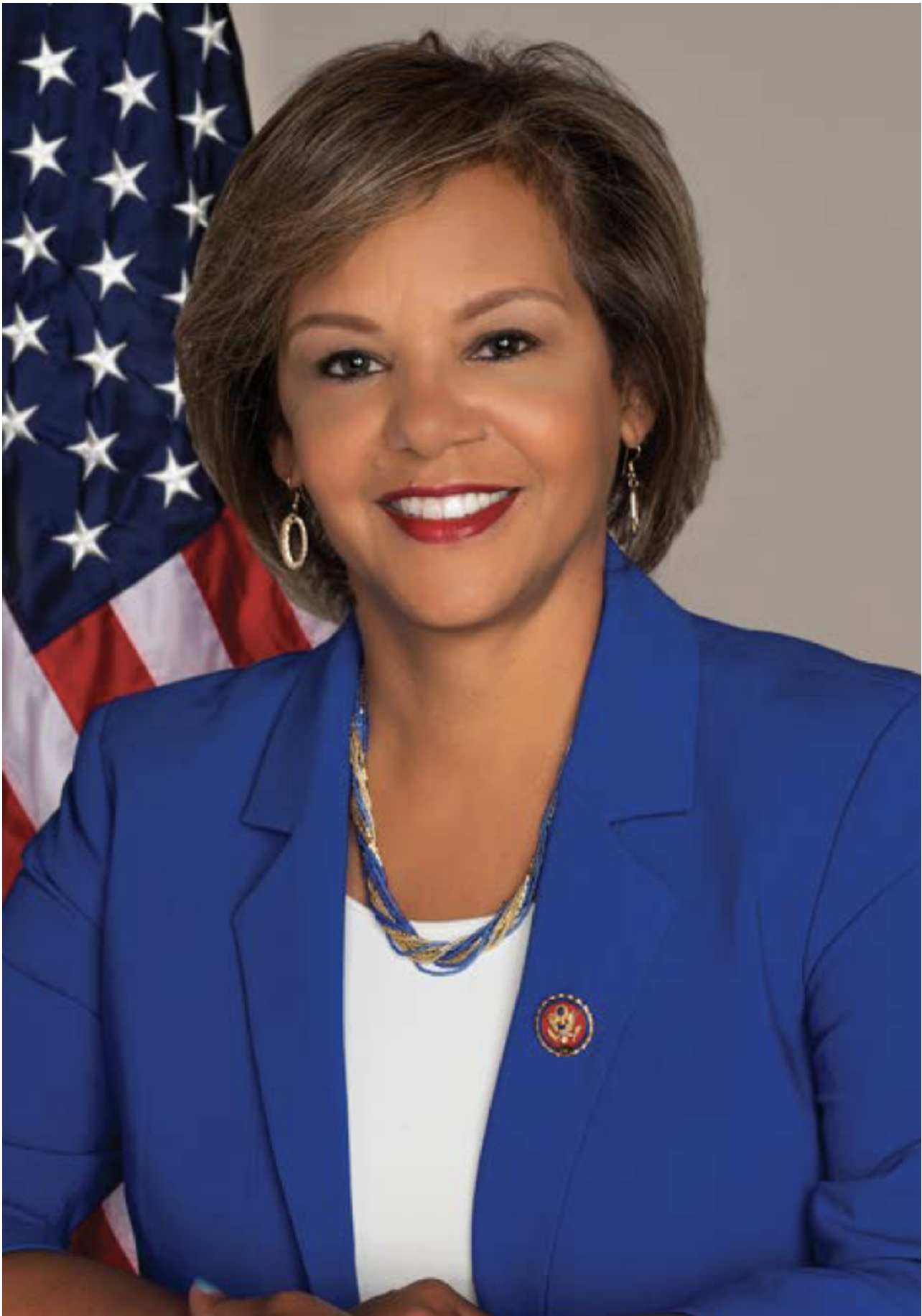




# Rep. Kelly, Senator Durbin Introduce Bicameral Promoting Access to Broadband Act

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**WASHINGTON, D.C.** – Congresswoman Robin Kelly (IL-02) and Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) introduced the *Promoting Access to Broadband Act of 2023* in the House of Representatives and the Senate. The legislation will make grants available to states to inform Medicaid enrollees, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participants, and low-income residents of their potential eligibility for the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) Lifeline program and Affordable Connectivity Programs (ACP).



The Lifeline program and ACP provide free or low-cost wireless service and internet capable devices to qualifying individuals. Affordable internet connection increases opportunities for education, employment, health access, and community building. The *Promoting Access to Broadband Act of 2023* will provide states with resources to increase awareness of these programs amongst eligible populations and increase usage of the Lifeline program and ACP.

According to the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, in 2022, one in every five households lacked access to broadband at home, and a 2021 Pew Research Center survey found that 27 percent of non-broadband users cited cost as the most important reason they do not have broadband at home.

ACP has made strides to close the digital divide with 21 million households enrolled in the program, including more than 622,000 households in Illinois. However, experts estimate that an additional 27 million households are eligible for the program. Further, participation in the Lifeline program has dropped in recent years and remains extremely low nationwide. The Universal Service Administrative Company estimates the number of eligible households participating in Lifeline nationwide is just 19 percent, and only 17 percent in Illinois.

“Internet capable devices are not a luxury – they are a necessity of modern life. I’m proud to introduce the *Promoting Access to Broadband Act* with Senator Durbin to increase access to the vital Lifeline program and ACP,” **said Congresswoman Robin Kelly.** “I represent a district that is urban, suburban, and rural – I know firsthand how important internet connection is whether you’re a student in Chicago, a farmer in Kankakee, or a doctor in Danville. Internet connectivity expands access to education opportunities, job opportunities, and resources like telemedicine. This legislation is a vital step toward eliminating the digital divide and ensuring that everyone has access to the resources they need to thrive.”

“The COVID-19 pandemic showed us just how critical high-quality, reliable broadband is for Americans when they need to connect to job opportunities, their online classrooms, their loved ones, and their medical professionals. However, cost remains a barrier for too many households, which is why Rep. Kelly and I want to increase awareness and enrollment in the FCC’s Lifeline program and Affordable Connectivity Program through our *Promoting Access to Broadband Act*,” **said Durbin.**

The *Promoting Access to Broadband Act* would:

- Award grants to at least five states;
- Direct the FCC to consider several factors in evaluating applications, including states with a higher number of covered individuals, states with plans with the

potential to reach a higher percentage of eligible-but-not-enrolled households, and geographic diversity;

- Allow states to use the funds to inform Medicaid enrollees, SNAP participants, and low-income individuals of potential eligibility, provide information on how to apply for Lifeline and ACP, and partner with non-profit and community-based organizations to assist individuals applying for Lifeline and ACP; and
- Require the FCC to issue a report to Congress within a year of establishing the grant program evaluating the grant's effectiveness.

To be eligible for these programs, an individual must have an income at or below 135 percent of the federal poverty guidelines for the Lifeline program and at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty guidelines for ACP. Enrollees also are eligible if they qualify for a needs-based program, such as Medicaid or SNAP, or receive Supplemental Security Income, federal public housing assistance, or Veterans Pension and Survivors Benefits.

The bill has earned endorsements from Third Way, Public Knowledge, NCLC, on behalf of its low-income clients, National Digital Inclusion Alliance, Common Sense Media, and Free Press.