

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Subsidized Internet Coming To Virgin Islands Low-Income Households Following F.C.C. Vote

Technology / **Published On April 02, 2016 11:00 PM /**

Staff **April 02, 2016**



ST. CROIX -- The Federal Communications Commission approved on Thursday a \$9.25 monthly broadband subsidy to help millions of low-income households connect to the Internet.

Three of the agency's five commissioners voted for the subsidy plan, with two against. The approval, which comes as part of the reform of a fund known as the Lifeline program -- of which the Virgin Islands is a part -- is the latest push by the F.C.C. to treat broadband like a public utility, as high-speed Internet has become increasingly crucial to households, used for doing homework, finding and maintaining employment, and completing other basic tasks.

The vote, falling along party lines, ensures that “Americans can access the dominant communications platform of the day,” said Tom Wheeler, the chairman of the F.C.C.

Currently, one in five people do not have access to broadband at home, and the vast majority of those disconnected are poor. Only about 40 percent of people earning less than \$25,000 a year can afford broadband while 95 percent of all households making over \$150,000 have high-speed Internet at home, the F.C.C. said.

Starting in December, those eligible for programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and tribal and veterans benefits, will be able to apply for the subsidy. The funds can be used for wireless or fixed-wire broadband. The F.C.C. said it would aim to keep the budget of the subsidy program under \$2.25 billion, money that is provided through line-item charges on wireless and Internet bills.

Among the biggest concerns is how financially disadvantaged families are being strained by their inability to connect to the Internet at home. Seven out of 10 schools assign homework that requires Internet access, for example. Most jobs are posted online, and applications for employment are increasingly becoming online-only.

“This meets the 21st-century needs for those most vulnerable,” said Mignon Clyburn, a Democratic commissioner.