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Philadelphia is expanding free internet access, offering no-cost service to families who have children receiving special education services or are English-

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New York Times
[Google Dominates Thanks to an Unrivaled View of the Web](#)

New York Post
[ESPN landing MLB rights to playoff round that doesn't yet exist](#)

Philadelphia Inquirer
[Dozens of Pennsylvania restaurants and gyms remain open as health secretary begs businesses: 'work with us'](#)

Spotlight PA
[Mailed ballots, tight deadlines caused a crunch for Pa. elections officials. Now, comes the reckoning.](#)

Harrisburg Patriot-News
[Pa. electors choose Joe Biden for president](#)

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
[Editorial: Metcalfe keeps wasting time](#)

language learners, and those who participate in public benefit programs with income qualifications.

PHLConnectED, a partnership between the city, school district, most charter schools, Comcast and others, has connected 12,000 families to date. Originally, the eligible included families who did not have internet access, only accessed the internet through cell phones, are [experiencing homelessness](#) or had students completing remote learning in spots without internet access.

The expansion covers some families who do have internet access, but who may be having trouble affording it, and it comes as Philadelphia's public schools remain fully virtual, with no return to in-person education on the horizon and the city in the [grip of a coronavirus spike](#) and significant restrictions. City officials announced the news Monday as part of a weeklong push to sign up more eligible families for the service. It's offered either via wired internet connections through Comcast's internet Essentials program or in the form of mobile hot spots, generally more suitable for families whose housing situation is less stable, including those living in homeless shelters.

The city's program, paid for with \$17 million in philanthropic support, guarantees free access through July 2022, though organizers hope funding will extend the offer beyond that point. "We want to connect as many families as possible to reliable internet access," Mayor Jim Kenney said in a statement. "As digital learning continues, access to high speed internet is more important than ever."

PHLConnectED has money for up to 35,000 families to be connected; it's unclear how many remain without reliable access. Earlier this year, Superintendent William R. Hite Jr. and others said an [estimated 18,000](#) families did not have internet access, but city and district officials have since backed away from that number, saying they're not able to approximate how many families remain unconnected.

Otis Hackney, the city's Chief Education Officer, said at a news conference Thursday that the number was "in the thousands." "We know that there are still significant numbers of families, but we don't have an exact figure," Hackney said. To that end, the city will ramp up its efforts to connect families this week, focusing on those who started but have not completed the sign-up process. Outreach will include texts, emails, and phone calls; hot spots will also be delivered to eligible families who have not picked them up. "We've long been aware of the inequities caused by the digital divide and PHLConnectED is a very real solution for us to close the gap and ensure that all children have access to the tools and resources required to successfully engage in digital learning," Hite said in a statement. Eligible city residents can call 211, then press 1, to start the sign-up process. — **Philadelphia Inquirer**

As the dust settles around the first phase of the FCC's \$9.2 billion Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) auction, one US Senator has taken aim at a longtime telecom provider and its plans to deploy 1Gbit/s services in West Virginia. "The stakes are simply too high to provide nearly \$250 million [for services in West Virginia] to a company that does not have the capability to deliver on the commitments made to the FCC," wrote Sen. Shelley Moore Capito, a Republican from West Virginia, [in a letter to the outgoing chairman of the FCC](#).

Capito argued that Frontier – which won a total of around \$371 million in RDOF money for rural broadband in eight states – should not be trusted to use the cash to deploy gigabit services in her state. "Frontier's mismanagement of prior federal funding through the Broadband Technology Opportunity Fund program, resulting in \$4.7 million in funds repaid to the federal government for improper use, raises significant questions about their ability to manage federal funds of this magnitude," Capito wrote in her letter. "Furthermore, Frontier has a documented pattern of history demonstrating inability to meet FCC deadlines for completion of Connect America Fund Phase II support in West Virginia. The

inability to deploy federal funds in a timely fashion to make improvements to a network delivering broadband service at speeds of 10/1Mbit/s or higher should raise significant concerns about their capacity to build out a network delivering 100 times that level."

In a statement to Light Reading, Frontier cited the FCC's quiet period – which prevents RDOF participants from discussing their plans – as its reason for dodging Capito's concerns. "Frontier has filed a short form to participate in the RDOF auction," the company said. "We cannot comment beyond what has been made publicly available by the FCC due to quiet period regulations." The quiet period is expected to end next month.

As with several other FCC programs designed to allocate money for rural networks, the RDOF was a reverse auction where companies and entities that submit the lowest bid for covering a particular area win – however, then they're on the hook to cover that area with broadband services. Frontier was [one of the top winners in the auction](#), scoring money to build network connections in roughly 127,000 locations spanning eight states. The company said it would meet its obligations using a mixture of fiber and fixed wireless technologies. However, the company has not yet filed its detailed, "long form" deployment plans. An FCC representative did not immediately respond to questions about Capito's letter regarding Frontier.

To be clear, Capito isn't the only one [raising concerns over the FCC's RDOF auction](#). For example, public-interest group Free Press [is arguing](#) the event is a "boondoggle" that allocates more than \$700 million for network services in non-rural areas. Others too have raised questions about the other companies in the auction that won significant chunks of money, including the many fixed wireless providers that argue they can provide 1Gbit/s services.

"We are unaware of any technological developments that would cause a 10x increase in fixed wireless performance and therefore, have some skepticism that the promises will be borne out," wrote the analysts at New Street Research in a note to investors this weekend. Now, though, the FCC is essentially stuck with its RDOF winners. And the agency will now be forced to enforce its RDOF buildup goals, either by carefully evaluating winners' "long form" deployment applications or by waiting to see if the companies can pull off what they have said they'll do. "The question for the FCC is how it will ensure that the parties live up to their commitments and then how will it address those cases where they don't," the New Street analysts wrote. – *LightReading*

The Federal Trade Commission on Monday ordered nine prominent social-media and internet companies to provide a litany of data about their operations [as part of a wide-ranging study](#) into their business practices.

The orders demand the companies turn over detailed, private business information about how they track Americans' online activities and [how they use that data](#). Companies receiving letters included Amazon.com Inc., Facebook Inc. and its subsidiary WhatsApp Inc., Reddit Inc., Snap Inc., Twitter Inc., Alphabet Inc.'s YouTube LLC, Discord Inc. and TikTok owner ByteDance Ltd., which is based in Beijing.

The announcement isn't a law-enforcement action and doesn't carry any immediate penalties, though the information gathered could form the basis for future action by the FTC. The agency has broad legal authority to seek information from U.S. companies and is also empowered to police unfair and deceptive business practices. "Social media and video streaming companies now follow users everywhere through apps on their always-present mobile devices. This constant access allows these firms to monitor where users go, the people with whom they interact, and what they are doing. But to what end?" FTC Commissioners Rohit Chopra, Rebecca Slaughter and Christine Wilson said in a joint statement. "Too much about the industry remains dangerously opaque."

FTC Chairman Joseph Simons voted with the 4-1 majority to approve the order, but without comment. Commissioner Noah Phillips dissented, saying he supported the broader objective but calling the FTC's request "an undisciplined foray into a wide variety of topics, some only tangentially related to the stated focus of this investigation." The companies have 45 days to respond.

Representatives of the companies generally declined to comment or didn't immediately respond to requests for comment. "We're working, as we always do, to ensure the FTC has the information it needs to understand how Twitter operates its services," said a Twitter spokesperson.

The FTC's move is the latest regulatory headache for tech companies in Washington, [following antitrust lawsuits](#) against Facebook and Alphabet's Google in recent weeks. Facebook and YouTube were also hit with FTC fines last year, Facebook for breaking promises about protecting user privacy and YouTube for impermissible [collection of data on child users](#). A 31-page sample order published by the agency demands an array of data and documentation related to business strategies, algorithms, advertising revenue and "each User Attribute that the Company uses, tracks, estimates, or derives." — *Wall Street Journal*

