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Broadband is Front and Center, Nationally and Locally

“Quality and affordable internet are no longer ‘nice to have.’ It has become a ‘need to have,’ it is as essential as electricity today.”

-Governor Lemanu Palepoi Sialega Mauga

On March 7, 2023, Governor Lemanu P. S. Mauga issued an executive order to formally establish the Broadband Coordination Office (BCORD) under the American Samoa Department of Commerce (ASDOC). Informally known as the BCORD Office, the development of the new unit follows a series of critical broadband developments – the publishing of the American Samoa Territorial Broadband Strategy (ASTBS) in October 2021; the passing of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) in November 2021 with \$65 billion allocated to broadband development; the ASDOC awarding \$9.5 million to local Internet Service Providers to improve internet services; and the recent awarding of a \$1.25 million planning grant to ASG to update and develop its 5-year broadband strategies.

“The Department of Commerce has been working on broadband coordination for the past five years, understanding how critical it can be in our efforts to diversify our economy,” said Governor Lemanu. “However, I felt it necessary to formally establish the BCORD Office to consolidate planning and coordination efforts and, more importantly, to send a clear message – this is one of this administration’s top priorities. Quality and affordable internet are no longer ‘nice to have.’ It has become a ‘need to have,’ it is as essential as electricity today. With American Samoa’s allocation of \$25 million or more for broadband programs, it is critical that our efforts are focused and coordinated.”

President Joseph Biden signed the IIJA into law on November 6, 2021. With that bill becoming law, the federal government invested unprecedented funding to support improved access to quality internet and broadband services. For example, the “Internet for All” initiative, via the National Telecommunications and Information Agency’s Broadband, Equity, Access, and Deployment program, allocates \$25 million to each Territory. In addition, the Digital Equity and Middle Mile Infrastructure programs provide additional funding support to close the digital divide.

Most US states have developed or are in the process of developing their own internet offices in response to this funding, the creation of the BCORD is the first such formal announcement by any of the four territories at the \$25 million level of funding.

“The Department of Commerce will soon be coordinating outreach efforts to solicit input and feedback from the community to update our American Samoa Territory Broadband Strategy,” stated the ASDOC Director, Petti T. Matila. “Since we have the strategy document ready to update and now the formal creation of the BCORD, we are well-positioned to guide the project implementation phase to improve internet and digital equity for all residents of American Samoa. We expect to work with companies, non-profit organizations, and other institutions along the way who may be eligible to compete for these funds and help support improvements to our digital society.”

For more information, visit www.doc.as.gov/broadband or email BCORD@doc.as.gov.

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