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CAMDEN BRIDGE'S DIGITAL DIVIDE BY KICKING-OFF INITIATIVE AIMED AT EXPANDING HIGH-SPEED INTERNET ADOPTION

CAMDEN, NJ – Today, the City of Camden, Mayor Dana L. Redd, City Council President Frank Moran, Camden County Freeholders Ian Leonard and Johnathan Young, Executive Director Maria Marquez and Chairperson Deborah Person-Polk of the Housing Authority of the City of Camden, Superintendent Paymon Rouhanifard, HUD Field Office Director Maria Maio-Messano, Comcast, and a host of partners held a press conference at the Housing Authority's Community Supportive Service Center, on Boyd Street in Camden to announce the kick-off of the "ConnectHome Convening" initiative.

The ConnectHome Convening initiative is a pilot based on the Federal ConnectHome program, that's being launched in 27 cities including the City of Camden and one tribal nation. Announced in July 2015 by President Obama and HUD Secretary Julian Castro, it's a collective effort between communities, the private sector and the federal government aimed at expanded high-speed Internet adoption to more families across the country, particularly those families in our public housing communities.

Camden's ConnectHome Convening will be a similar partnership between the City, the Housing Authority, Comcast (through its Internet Essentials program), non-profits and the private sector. The goal of Camden's program is to also offer expanded broadband adoption, access to computers, in addition to technical training and digital literacy programs for residents living in assisted housing units.

"While breaking digital barriers that limit a certain population from gaining expanded broadband adoption may have its challenges, we stand ready and committed to working in partnership with HUD and others to create solutions to ensure everyone, regardless of your background, income or zip code, has an equal opportunity to obtain broadband services," said Mayor Redd.

"Unlimited information is literally at our fingertips," said City Council President Frank Moran.

"Unfortunately, in many urban centers with high rates of poverty like Camden, this digital information is not always available to families with limited or fixed incomes."

"For the past four years, we've been hard at work to close the digital divide through the Internet Essentials program, the nation's largest high-speed Internet adoption program for low-income families," said Jim Samaha, senior vice president, Comcast Freedom Region. "Internet Essentials is our community investment priority and we are excited to be a part of the ConnectHome Convening and to see more attention and effort focused on digital inclusion."

“The City, Housing Authority and our many public and private partners are commitment to narrowing the broadband digital divide within our community,” said Maria Marquez, Executive Director of the Housing Authority of the City of Camden. “Without a doubt, we are living in a digital world where we are all connected to one another and to every aspect of our daily lives; whether through our cell phones or our computers at home.”

"With ConnectHome, Camden students living in assisted housing will have access to high speed internet, an essential tool that will allow them to achieve their full potential," said Maria Maio-Messano, HUD New Jersey Field Office Director. "HUD will begin rulemaking to require that HUD-funded new residential construction and rehabilitation projects support broadband connectivity, and provide communities with flexibility to spend HUD funding on local broadband initiatives. I am proud to be part of this initiative and look forward to the potential results: Camden youth having the best opportunity for success."

The Housing Authority’s Community Supportive Service Center, located at 150 Boyd Street in Camden will be host to the ConnectHome Convening program. Residents can enter the center from Monday through Friday to utilize computers, gain access to a new job platform kiosk donated by Apploi, and take advantage of a number of digital resources focusing on basic computer fundamentals, academic achievement, college preparation and even software development. This program includes additional resources provided by partners like:

- ***ABCmouse.com*** who have developed age specific online curriculum for young people that will help them build a strong academic foundation.
- ***American Library Association (ALA) and Camden County*** who will be hosting a series of basic and fundamental computer classes at the Ferry Branch Library (to register call 856-342-9789).
- ***GiftHub*** who encourage software creation/development and provided resource to those next generation digital innovators.
- ***College Board*** who proudly offer free online SAT practice resources (which include study tips, practice tests and questions) and access to rich college planning and search services such as Big Future.
- ***Apploi*** who have developed and donated their award winning job platform kiosk which will allow those without Internet connections to search and apply for jobs. With more than 5600 companies hiring throughout their system Apploi enables job seekers to showcase their skills while giving employers the technology to better select and hire candidates.

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