

**TESTIMONY OF JIM LEWIS, COMCAST VICE PRESIDENT OF GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS  
STATE OF TEXAS SENATE BUSINESS AND COMMERCE COMMITTEE**

**INTERIM COMMITTEE HEARING  
AUGUST 14, 2012**

- Good morning, my name is Jim Lewis and I am the Vice President of Government Affairs for Comcast's West Division which extends from Texas to the Pacific coast. I'd like to thank Chairman Carona and Vice-Chairman Harris for holding this important hearing today. I'd also like to extend special thanks to Senators Whitmire and Jackson as your constituents are some of our best customers and our team here in Texas certainly enjoys working with your offices.
- Comcast is a member of the Texas Cable Association and Texas' second largest cable provider and serves the greater Houston area including the counties of Harris, Galveston, Brazoria, Fort Bend, Montgomery, Liberty and Chambers.
- Today, I would like to share with you some information about our Internet Essentials program--our company's broadband adoption program for low-income families.
- I would also like to point out that other Texas Cable Association members such as Time Warner Cable, Suddenlink Communications and Charter Communications are implementing similar broadband adoption programs of their own.
- We believe, and studies have shown, that there are three barriers to improving broadband adoption rates. First is that there are still many people that lack an understanding of basic computer skills and they don't see the relevancy of having access. The second is affordability and the third is lack of a computer in the home.
- One year ago, Comcast launched Internet Essentials, the largest and most comprehensive broadband adoption program anywhere in America in an effort to address these three barriers. Comcast provides low-cost broadband service to qualifying families for only \$9.95 a month; the option to purchase a full-service, Internet-ready computer for under \$150; and multiple options for digital literacy training in print, online and in-person. A family is eligible to participate if they qualify for the National School Lunch Program.
- After taxes, there are no additional fees and the family remains eligible until the student graduates from high school so long as the family continues to qualify for the National School Lunch Program.
- In the first full year of the program's availability, we connected nearly 100,000 families, or more than 400,000 low-income Americans, to the power of the Internet in their homes, some for the very first time. Among all of our markets, Houston ranks #3 in terms of participation and we have been able to build this response through partnerships with major school districts, non-profits and of course elected officials.
- Through our website [internetessentials.com](http://internetessentials.com) partners can order free brochures and other collateral to distribute to students and parents. School districts are now ordering materials

for the back to school window. They have been our biggest champions as they recognize the importance an internet connection can play towards the success of the student.

- In year two, we're even more committed and determined to connect more families to the Internet because about 30% of Americans—many of whom are living below the poverty line—remain on the wrong side of the digital divide.
- As we enter year two of Internet Essentials, we have expanded eligibility to now include students on free and reduced priced lunches, doubled broadband speeds and accelerated the sign-up process making it even easier for families to sign up.
- A key component of the program is our free in-person digital literacy training programs being offered across the country. In Houston we have partnered with the Houston Area Urban League, The Association for the Advancement of Mexican Americans and Neighborhood Centers Inc. to provide training in multiple locations.
- We have also made improvements to the Internet safety and security software we provide for free with Internet Essentials to include our Constant Guard Protection Suite, which includes the top-rated Norton Security software, identity theft protection software, password safeguards and more.
- Internet Essentials today is very different from when we first started out. That's because we've continuously made enhancements, not because we had to or were required to, but because the public reaction to the program was so enthusiastic we wanted to keep making the program even better.
- We've also taken a number of steps to increase enrollment by:
  - Hosting information booths at public events where people can find out more about the program. As a recent example, last week we participated in the Houston ISD back to school fair where over 25,000 were in attendance.
  - We are also enabling our non-profit partners to purchase Internet Essentials accounts in bulk orders so that if they have funding, then they can help connect qualifying families in the communities they serve. In Houston we are partnering with Neighborhood Centers Inc. so that more of their clients can gain access.
- As gratifying as these initial results are to us, we recognize there is still a long road ahead. We knew this was not going to be an easy task, but we remain firmly committed to the important cause of providing low-income families with an opportunity to connect to affordable broadband service.
- Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.