Individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing face significant barriers. Providing broadband to low-income, school-aged, deaf Alabama residents who do not have access will enrich their lives by affording tangible opportunities for education, training, and communication. Dr. Robert Davila, Dr. Vint Cerf, and Dr. John Schuchman have formed the Broadband for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Corporation ('Applicant' or 'BDHH') to bring broadband Internet access to the vulnerable and underserved low-income deaf and hard of hearing school-aged population. They have launched this project because it has the power to transform the lives of deaf children (hereinafter including the deaf and hard of hearing) who are frequently excluded from the benefits of the high-tech broadband community. The Applicant will provide broadband Internet access for two years to a target of 1,742 low-income households that include a deaf child aged five to eighteen and will provide outreach, access, and support services to facilitate greater use of broadband Internet access by this vulnerable population. The project will provide a 'jump start' that will stimulate demand for broadband by these households for years to come. Professionals with years of experience in the deaf and hard of hearing communities will lead the Broadband for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Corporation. These renowned professionals are proven leaders in technology and education who possess a deep understanding of the deaf community. THE NEED The deaf community faces disproportionately high rates of unemployment and poverty. (See Erika Steinmetz, Current Population Reports in Americans With Disabilities: 2002, Household Economic Studies, U.S. Census Bureau (issued May 2006), available at: http://www.census.gov/prod/2006pubs/p70-107.pdf.) These economic factors, combined with persistent cultural barriers such as discrimination and bias, have often isolated and marginalized the deaf population. (See The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, 42 U.S.C. 12101(a) (discrimination against individuals with disabilities continues to be a serious and pervasive social problem).) Deaf Americans are much more likely than their hearing counterparts to have inadequate access to healthcare, education, government agencies or services, or support networks. (See Position Statement on Mental Health Services for People who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing. National Association of the Deaf, 2003, available at: http://www.nad.org/issues/health-care/mental-health-services/position-statement.) Deaf Americans' access to the nation's communications system has been particularly limited, and only began to improve with the mandate of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 ('ADA') to provide deaf individuals with 'functionally equivalent' communications services. For deaf children, broadband access is necessary to allow for integration into school communities and for full use of research and educational tools. As these deaf students grow up, broadband will assist them in becoming active participants in the high-tech economy and community. THE TARGET POPULATION
Applicant's project targets impoverished deaf school-aged children who live in Alabama. There are approximately 2,322 qualifying children in Alabama. It is common for there to be more than one deaf individual per household. Assuming that each qualifying household in Alabama has an estimated average of 1.5 deaf members, then 2,322 households, composed of 3,483 deaf individuals, could qualify for broadband Internet assistance under Applicant's proposal. Applicant anticipates serving three-quarters of the qualifying low-income households with a deaf child, approximately 1,742 households, consisting of 2,613 deaf individuals. UNIQUE, SIGNIFICANT, AND SUSTAINABLE BENEFITS FOR DEAF CHILDREN - AN UNDERSERVED, VULNERABLE POPULATION Broadband has enormous potential to lower or eliminate the barriers that historically have caused deaf Americans to be isolated or marginalized. Empowered with broadband, deaf students can access training and educational materials and communicate with friends, family, and classmates. With broadband access, deaf children who use American Sign Language ('ASL') can communicate across distance quickly and naturally in their primary language by using Video Relay Service. For many ASL users ' such as children who are too young to type ' video communication is the only means of communicating with another person over distance. Providing school-aged deaf children in Alabama with broadband access is an innovative approach to improving their daily lives and educational successes. There has never been financial support for such a program. The proposed project will bring sustainable benefits to this underserved and vulnerable population by introducing low-income deaf families to the opportunities that broadband access provides. The knowledge that deaf children gain about the benefits of broadband will provide lasting and sustainable improvements to their daily lives. The project will also create sustainable increases in broadband adoption rates beyond the grant period by providing deaf users the opportunity to receive broadband service at reduced rates at the conclusion of the funding period.