

March 12, 2020

Chairman Ajit Pai
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20054

Dear Chairman Pai:

Representing K-12 public and private school and public library beneficiaries of the E-rate Program, the Education and Library Networks Coalition (EdLiNC) urges the Federal Communications Commission to respond quickly to the current global COVID-19 pandemic by making use of its emergency powers to temporarily waive relevant E-rate program rules to ensure that all K-12 students have adequate home internet connectivity if their schools close.

We believe the Commission, which oversees the E-rate and all universal service programs, is uniquely positioned to take short-term, immediate action to allow E-rate beneficiaries to receive additional E-rate support to provide home wireless service to existing school devices and hotspots for students who lack internet access at home. The COVID-19 epidemic has shone a bright light on the “homework gap” experienced by millions of students in every corner of this country who do not have internet access at home. Already, more than 70 percent of educators assign schoolwork requiring the internet, which leaves many low-income and rural students at an educational and technological disadvantage.

As schools consider closing for days or even weeks in response to this health crisis, school districts and teachers are struggling with how to bring learning online where a number of their students may lack the connectivity to participate. Our nation’s public libraries are also struggling to support students and their families as school districts make the difficult decision to close. While our libraries will continue to play a vital role in bridging the digital gaps for all learners, more is needed now. We believe that temporarily changing E-rate rules to allow for support for home internet access would be of immense help to schools, students and their families during this difficult time.

Therefore, we call upon the Commission to explore taking swift, immediate action to help address home internet inequity among students that this crisis is poised to exacerbate. Time is of the essence as some schools have already made the tough decision to close to help protect the health and safety of educators, staff and students. We stand ready to work with you immediately to narrow the homework gap as much as possible in the short-term, as we continue to work to find a solution to eliminate it all together.

Sincerely,

AASA, The School Superintendents Association
American Federation of Teachers
American Library Association
Association of Educational Service Agencies

Association of School Business Officials International
CoSN – Consortium for School Networking
Council of Chief State School Officers
International Society for Technology in Education
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Independent Schools
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Association of State Boards of Education
National Catholic Educational Association
National Education Association
National PTA
National Rural Education Advocacy Consortium
National Rural Education Association
National School Boards Association
State Educational Technology Directors Association
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

cc: Commissioner Rosenworcel
Commissioner Starks
Commissioner Carr
Commissioner O’Rielly