

**REMARKS OF
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CHIEF OFFICERS OF STATE LIBRARY AGENCIES MEETING
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Good afternoon. Thank you to the Chief Officers of State Libraries for having me here on the heels of the American Library Association legislative conference. I want to spend a little time today and talk about the future—the future of libraries and technology.

But before talking about what lies ahead, I want to talk about where we are right now. This is the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library—and it's the crown jewel of the District of Columbia library system. The building itself is the work of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, an architect who is famous for a style that is distinctly modern—all lines and futuristic simplicity. But that's just the outside. Look around, and inside you'll find another kind of modern. You'll find a 3-D printer, an “on demand” book printing machine, and computer programming classes in the Digital Commons—all of this on top of books.

This library is a far cry from the one I knew growing up. I spent most of my childhood in a town in central Connecticut. Like most New England communities, the library is smack in the middle, near the town green. As you might imagine—being New England—the library is brick, Colonial, and old. It's nothing like the building we are in right now. It's also named for Noah Webster, who is the town's most famous native son. I spent a lot of time there as a child—picking up slim volumes as an early reader and pulling down bulky encyclopedias as an older student. I can still recall the blonde wood of the card catalog, the courier typeface on every index card entry, and the way the drawers gracefully slid out with the slightest pull. I can also recall the blocky microfiche machines I used for research projects and papers—at a time when that was the best way to access news and information.

The library still stands in the same place back home. But it is worlds away from the book-filled center I knew in my youth. Even in a New England town where change comes very slowly—and we are very proud of that—the library resources now go well beyond the printed page. It has computer classes, web-based systems for instruction in more than 100 languages, and thousands of eBooks and audiobooks that can be downloaded by patrons in the building or at home.

Modern libraries—whether in a Colonial building or a contemporary facility like this one—are amazing places. They are now so much more than books; they are centers of knowledge dissemination—in all its forms. They are also vital to our communities. Half of all Americans used their public library in some form during the past year. And as the digital age makes its way through our commercial and civic lives, I think libraries are going to grow more important—not less.

So with that in mind, I want to discuss efforts at the Federal Communications Commission that involve libraries. Specifically, I want to talk about our efforts to reboot,

reinvigorate, and recharge E-Rate—or what I like to call E-Rate 2.0. And before I finish, I want to talk about another hot topic before the FCC—our efforts on network neutrality.

The E-Rate program, as some of you may know, is the nation’s largest educational technology program—and it’s run by the FCC. E-Rate helps connect all of our schools and libraries to modern communications and the Internet. Support from the program is based on need. More funding is available for those schools and libraries serving low-income students and those located in rural areas.

E-Rate is a byproduct of the Telecommunications Act of 1996. Remember 1996? You might have called the Internet the “information superhighway.” I know I did. In 1996, less than one percent of American households subscribed to broadband service. Gas was a dollar a gallon. It was a long time ago. At the time of passage of this law, only 28 percent of libraries provided public Internet access. Today 99 percent of libraries are connected—in 16,000 communities across the nation.

Impressive! It might sound like the job is done. But nothing could be further from the truth. Because the challenge today is no longer connection—it’s capacity. And on that front, I think we have work to do.

Our records suggest that 80 percent of schools and libraries believe their broadband connections do not meet their current needs. Eighty percent! So let’s be honest. Those needs are only going to grow. Nationwide, in nearly two-thirds of communities, libraries are the only place people can access the Internet for free. Libraries have reported to the FCC that every year they see more and more requests to use public access computers and get online. Moreover, more and more information resources are headed to libraries in digital format, putting more pressure than ever before on bandwidth.

Plus, for those who lack access to broadband at home, libraries are a lifeline. Because access to broadband is access to opportunity.

Access to broadband in libraries means access to jobs. Consider this—80 percent of Fortune 500 companies now require those seeking jobs to apply online. Getting online in a library is often the first step to getting a job.

Access to broadband in libraries means access to education. Libraries have always been centers for lifelong learning. But for younger students, library access to broadband is an extension of the connected classroom. We cannot forget that in a world where students are dependent on digital content in school, their homework depends on broadband access. But for families that cannot afford high-speed connections at home, this is the source of a cruel homework gap. Libraries can help fill that gap.

Access to broadband in libraries also means access to information—for all. This strengthens our communities. It keeps us creative, it keeps us questioning, and that makes us better citizens.

But if we want to keep up and make sure our libraries have the bandwidth necessary to support this opportunity, we need a revitalized E-Rate. We need E-Rate 2.0. Just like with the evolution of any operating system, we need to take the good that we have put in place, build on it, and upgrade it for the future.

So it's good news that at the FCC we have a public rulemaking. Last year we proposed changes to E-Rate and asked for ideas from stakeholders of every stripe. When we finish our review—and I hope it is soon—we need to take this program that Congress authorized almost two decades ago and get it in good shape for the broadband era. Because if we just keep on keeping on with the E-Rate program we have we will miss a big opportunity—the opportunity to bring digital age learning to all of our schools and libraries.

This is where I have an admission. When it comes to E-Rate, schools get all the glory. We talk about disruption, digital age education, data—and it all focuses on students. So let me be clear—libraries have been an essential part of the E-Rate program from the start. They will be an essential part of the E-Rate program going forward. I pledge that to you, right here, right now—in this library. But as we go forward, I hope you will continue to lock arms and work with your school counterparts on the E-Rate program. Avoid the temptation to divide this program—you are now, and will always be, stronger together.

Now I want to talk about the essential elements of E-Rate reform. I've got three: Speed, Simplify, and Spending Smart. I think this is what we need to focus on if we want to put E-Rate 2.0 in place.

First, Speed. We need to get high-capacity broadband to schools and libraries. Let me tell you what I mean by really high-speed broadband. In the near term, we want to have 100 Megabits per 1000 students to all of our schools. By the end of the decade, we want to have 1 Gigabit per 1000 students to all of our schools. Libraries need access on par with these goals—and I hope you'll help us develop ways to measure them. As part of this effort, the FCC will need to collect better data from our E-Rate applicants—including libraries—about what capacity they have and what capacity they need. That way we can fine tune our efforts over time to achieve our goals.

Second, Simplify. The E-Rate program is too complicated. This is a program that can be about blazing a path for broadband in the digital age. Then why does it have such a messy paper trail? It has become too difficult and expensive for applicants to navigate our process, especially schools and libraries in low-income and rural areas that are most in need. That is just not right.

So I want us to reduce the bureaucracy associated with E-Rate.

To this end, I would like to see multiyear applications. As small as that sounds, the impact could be big. If applications were due every other year, that would cut the administrative cost of applying in half.

I also would like to see more incentives for consortia in the application process. When applicants work together they can navigate the process together and benefit from more cost-

effective bulk purchasing. Moreover, by encouraging consortia to include nearby schools and libraries that lack high-speed connections, we can use local forces to help bring everyone along.

Finally, Spending Smart. We need to spend our limited E-Rate dollars intelligently.

Spending smart means better accounting practices that the FCC has already identified will free up more E-Rate broadband support over the next two years.

But spending smart goes beyond that. Because on a long-term basis we need to make sure that all E-Rate support is focused on high-speed broadband. To that end, the time has come to phase down the estimated \$600 million this program now spends annually on outdated services like paging. If we reduce this expense over time we can free up more funds for high-capacity services.

Spending smart also means owning up to the fact that inflation has cut the purchasing power of this program. The E-Rate program was sized at \$2.25 billion in annual support back in 1998. No one buys Internet access in 1998 dollars anymore. So we need to fix this and at a minimum restore the purchasing power of this program by bringing back what inflation has taken away. Between when the cap was put in place and other adjustments were made in 2010 that is nearly \$1 billion.

So I've boiled E-Rate reform down to these three essentials—speed, simplicity, and spending smart. I hope libraries can help us soldier on and finish what we've started. Because this is big. And working together we can spur great things with E-Rate 2.0—and great things for the future of libraries and technology.

So that's the E-Rate story. I want to end by briefly talking about something else that is before the FCC—network neutrality. Network neutrality is the principle that consumers can go where they want and do what they want on the Internet, without interference from their broadband provider. The American Library Association and the library community have long been champions of network neutrality and an open Internet. Libraries, of course, know that an open Internet is important for free speech, access to information, and economic growth. I also support an open Internet. So I have real concerns about FCC Chairman Wheeler's proposal on network neutrality—which is before the agency right now.

To his credit, he has acknowledged that all options are on the table. This includes discussion about what a “commercially reasonable” Internet fast lane looks like. While I do not know now where this conversation will head on a substantive basis, I can tell you right now I have real concerns about process.

His proposal has unleashed a torrent of public response. Tens of thousands of e-mails, hundreds of calls, commentary all across the Internet. We need to respect that input and we need time for that input. So while I recognize the urgency to move ahead and develop rules with dispatch, I think the greater urgency comes in giving the American public opportunity to speak right now, before we head down this road.

For this reason, I think we should delay our consideration of his rules by at least a month. I believe that rushing headlong into a rulemaking next week fails to respect the public response to his proposal.

At a minimum, I think we need to recognize this is not business as usual. Starting tomorrow, the Sunshine Period kicks in in our deliberations. That means we no longer accept public comment. I think it's a mistake to cut off public debate right now as we head into consideration of the Chairman's proposal. So again, at a minimum, we should delay the onset of our Sunshine rules.

In addition, we have a challenging set of court decisions that have led us to this point. So I think the agency's legal staff should be holding forth, answering questions, and explaining what is before us with regular sessions—not in Washington, but over the Internet, through social media, and broadly accessible to the public.

So some big things are before the FCC right now. They affect the future of technology—and the future of libraries. I hope on E-Rate and beyond you'll stay in touch, give us your best ideas, and help us update our policies so we can develop more digital opportunities—everywhere.

Thank you.