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U.S. SENATE CLIMATE CHANGE CLEARING HOUSE

United States Senate

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The Honorable Tom Wheeler
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th St. SW
Washington, DC 20554

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Dear Chairman Wheeler:

The E-Rate has proved exceptional and essential in linking up schools and libraries to the Internet. As the House author of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, a law that established the E-Rate, I am proud that the E-Rate has ensured that schools and libraries provide Internet access, so that students and citizens from working-class neighborhoods can connect just like those from more affluent communities. It's the only technology that has been deployed as fast in poor neighborhoods as it has in rich ones. But now, with technology expanding into nearly every facet of our lives, we need to ensure all Americans – whether urban or rural, rich or poor -- remain connected and competitive in this global economy. I therefore commend you for addressing how this already successful program can more efficiently and effectively provide advanced Internet access for all students, teachers, library users, and librarians in Massachusetts and around the country.

As you work on updating the program to keep pace with modern technology, I hope you will focus on the special needs of all those who are disadvantaged in our age of increasing inequality. Schools and libraries provide the only free public Internet access in many locations. This service is especially important to people who lack broadband at home, or need assistance in using the Internet. These groups disproportionately include low-income users, recent immigrants, and people with disabilities – many of whom disproportionately live in urban and rural areas. Moreover, urban and rural areas often face relatively high costs of providing Internet access. Need and cost, then, lead to the conclusion that the Commission should consider these particular requirements when assessing how to allocate E-Rate funding for urban and rural schools and libraries.

As you know, wireless bandwidth is not just a function of the size of any particular classroom or library workspace. In fact, small, cramped, crowded buildings often require more spending for wireless connectivity per square foot than uncrowded buildings. Therefore, a single flat rate of E-Rate funding per square foot – reportedly under consideration by the Commission – might well not lead to adequate wireless connectivity in urban and rural buildings. Instead, the Commission should consider a wide range of factors including the number of users, connection from wireless

in other buildings, architectural impediments, inside cabling, and the speed of access to the buildings.

I look forward to continuing to work with you to ensure that the E-Rate remains strong for generations to come, just as Congress intended when we put the E-Rate into law almost two decades ago.

Sincerely,


Edward J. Markey
United States Senate