

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 20, 2014

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

Dear Chairman Wheeler:

E-rate modernization, as part of the President Obama's ConnectEd proposal, is essential to improve equitable educational opportunities for all children and to connect 99 percent of all American students with access to next generation, high-capacity broadband services and high-speed wireless. While the E-rate program has been successful at bringing technology and telecommunications into the classroom, improvements to bring the program up-to-date are needed. We urge you to move promptly to ensure that the most commonsense changes are implemented in time to be of use to schools during the next E-rate funding year and beyond.

A failure to modernize E-Rate will further entrench the digital divide. For many of our under-represented and underserved communities, high-capacity broadband access at schools and libraries is absolutely essential. This can be particularly true in suburban and rural areas. A recent analysis demonstrated that the wealthiest school districts in the country are almost twice as likely as the average school to have adequate broadband speeds. The schools serving the most financially challenged students are 30 percent less likely than average to have access to the same bandwidth. This is the case even though the E-rate fund is set up to provide the greatest discounts to the poorest schools—program modernizations should ensure improved outcomes for schools and libraries serving the lowest income communities.

The technological priorities of the E-rate program should be updated to fit current needs. Children require connectivity in the classroom, and technologies such as Wi-Fi which bring the Internet into classrooms should receive a greater emphasis than when E-rate was created in 1996. As Chairman Wheeler recently noted, “‘connectivity’ used to mean connecting to the school; today it means connections to each student.”

In order to have the greatest impact and to meet the President's ConnectED goals, updates to E-rate must focus on broadband capacity and infrastructure, transparency, accountability, and simplified administrative process, all of which will enable schools to select the fastest technologies at the lowest prices and stretch scarce program dollars farther. We encourage rapid action now, and comprehensive changes to the program in no less than one year. Implementing changes in time for the next E-rate funding year will have a profoundly positive impact in many areas of the country. There is no time to waste.

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This year 3.3 million high school seniors graduated relying on an E-rate program geared toward yesterday's needs. Please act quickly so that today's sophomores can see the benefits of an improved E-rate before they finish high school, and act comprehensively so that every school can afford the fastest, most economically-efficient technology.

Sincerely,



G. K. Butterfield
Member of Congress



Mark Meadows
Member of Congress



Ruben Hinojosa
Member of Congress



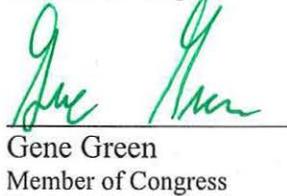
Walter B. Jones
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David Scott
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Gene Green
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Sheila Jackson Lee
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Hank Johnson
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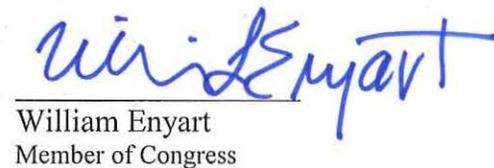
Collin Peterson
Member of Congress



Ben Ray Lujan
Member of Congress



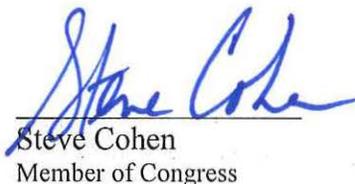
Sam Farr
Member of Congress



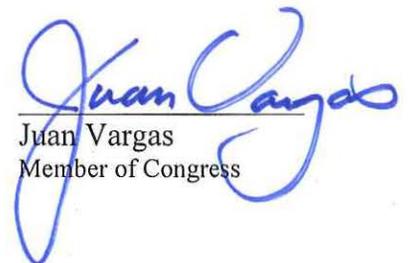
William Enyart
Member of Congress



Carol Shea-Porter
Member of Congress



Steve Cohen
Member of Congress



Juan Vargas
Member of Congress

cc: Commissioner Clyburn
Commissioner O'Rielly
Commissioner Pai
Commissioner Rosenworcel