

KELLY A. AYOTTE
NEW HAMPSHIRE

COMMITTEES:

ARMED SERVICES

COMMERCE

HOMELAND SECURITY &
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

BUDGET

AGING

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

(202) 224-3324

144 RUSSELL BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

1200 ELM STREET, SUITE 2
MANCHESTER, NH 03101

144 MAIN STREET
NASHUA, NH 03060

14 MANCHESTER SQUARE, SUITE 140
PORTSMOUTH, NH 03801

19 PLEASANT STREET, SUITE 13B
BERLIN, NH 03570

July 9, 2014

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

712

Dear Chairman Wheeler:

As the FCC prepares to vote this Friday on proposed changes to the E-Rate program, I am writing to renew my call for meaningful reform that distributes E-Rate funds more equitably, simplifies the application process and reduces administrative burdens, and gives schools greater flexibility to spend funds on technologies that directly benefit students.

Schools and libraries in New Hampshire, especially rural areas, are in dire need of communications services. Minor tweaks to the current system will fail to address these urgent needs.

The intent of E-Rate is to provide rural, urban, and suburban students the same access to quality communications services. But the current E-Rate distribution formula fails states like New Hampshire, where many schools and libraries remain unserved or underserved despite the fact that we are proportionally the largest donor state in the country. In fact, New Hampshire ranks 50 out of 50 states when it comes to return on our E-Rate dollar. For example, in 2012, New Hampshire contributed over \$10.3 million, but received only \$2.6 million – amounting to a return of only 25.2 cents on the dollar.

To give students in New Hampshire and other rural states a fairer shake, we need real E-Rate reform. That means simplifying the process by reducing the paperwork needed to apply for funding. It also means distributing aid to schools on a more equitable per-student basis (rather than the complex discount formula that the program now uses). Moreover, this means giving schools the flexibility to spend E-Rate funds on technologies that directly benefit students, instead of a complicated system of technology priorities dictated by Washington.

A final, critical point: Unless and until reforms like these are adopted, the FCC should not consider an increase in the size of the E-Rate budget. Without substantial operational changes to the program, and adequate time to study the

effectiveness of those changes, any budget increase would be both premature and harmful to the consumers who would have to pay for it.

As you finalize your rulemaking, the Commission must work in a bipartisan manner that will deliver true reform and equity to the program – not just tinker around the edges. Working in partnership with all five commissioners will also increase the credibility of E-rate and the reforms undertaken. This is an important opportunity to work in a collaborative manner to achieve the E-Rate reforms that so many rural communities desperately need. I look forward to working with you and your FCC colleagues to achieve this objective.

Sincerely,



Kelly A. Ayotte
U.S. Senator

Cc: Commissioner Mignon Clyburn
Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel
Commissioner Ajit Pai
Commissioner Michael O’Rielly