

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 8, 2020

The Honorable Ajit Pai
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th St. S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

Dear Chairman Pai:

As schools across the country continue to adapt to distance learning, many students, especially in low-income or rural communities, are at risk of being left behind due to the digital divide. To keep our promise to our students, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) should do everything in its authority to ensure they have adequate access to distance learning tools and broadband connectivity, protect consumers from predatory practices, and provide schools with additional flexibility in using federal funds for distance learning purposes and work to eliminate data caps and overage fees. Such work by the FCC, in coordination with Congressional efforts, would help bridge the digital divide and assist all of our students to get through these tough times and on the road to academic success.

While states and school districts are stepping up to provide laptops, tablets, mobile hot spots, and other equipment essential to distance learning, some schools cannot afford to this technology for all students, especially as they face budget crunches. Many students lack adequate broadband connectivity to support distance learning in the first place.

Congress is prepared to meet this challenge head-on and is prioritizing broadband and distance learning technology funding in our COVID-19 relief packages. House Democrats' *Take Responsibility for Workers and Families Act* included \$2 billion for internet-connected devices for students during this pandemic, and there are several proposals to make bold investments in broadband deployment as part of recovery infrastructure legislation.

However, there are additional steps the FCC can take right now to help students and protect consumers. The FCC should use its authority to ensure that telecommunications providers are serving all students, regardless of where they live or their income level, have adequate access to broadband so they can continue to learn.

While many telecommunications service providers have already extended free internet service for students, we are concerned that some families may end up trapped by contracts that automatically bill them after the free period is over. These temporary services should not be free trials and should not be used an opportunity to take advantage of the families of vulnerable students, and the FCC should use its authority to prohibit predatory activities on the part of service providers.

We are also supportive proposals championed by Commissioner Rosenworcel, including increasing the flexibility of the E-Rate program to provide schools with mobile hot spots, and working with providers to eliminate data caps and overage fees for families with parents who are teleworking while their students take part in online classes.

Congress and the FCC both have a responsibility to ensure that every student has access to the connections they need for a quality education, especially as schools shift to online curriculums during this pandemic. The FCC should act to guarantee that students can access their curriculums through service providers or their schools while protecting consumers from unnecessary data caps, overage fees, and unexpected bills. We are hopeful the FCC will work with Congress to preserve equitable educational opportunities for all students during this challenging time.

Sincerely,



Jimmy Panetta
Member of Congress

/s/
Gilbert R. Cisneros, Jr.
Member of Congress

/s/
Sanford D. Bishop, Jr.
Member of Congress

/s/
Ruben Gallego
Member of Congress

/s/
Anne McLane Kuster
Member of Congress

/s/
Joseph D. Morelle
Member of Congress

/s/
Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress

/s/
Sheila Jackson Lee
Member of Congress

/s/
Jared Huffman
Member of Congress

/s/
Steven Horsford
Member of Congress

/s/
Ed Case
Member of Congress

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André Carson
Member of Congress

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Derek Kilmer
Member of Congress

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Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress

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Frederica S. Wilson
Member of Congress

/s/
Bill Foster
Member of Congress

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Jim Costa
Member of Congress

/s/
David Trone
Member of Congress

/s/
Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress

/s/
Katie Porter
Member of Congress

/s/
Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr
Member of Congress

/s/
Mike Levin
Member of Congress

/s/
Josh Harder
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable Michael O'Rielly, Commissioner
The Honorable Brendan Carr, Commissioner
The Honorable Jessica Rosenworcel, Commissioner
The Honorable Geoffrey Starks, Commissioner