

The Hon. Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Hon. Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Hon. Roger Wicker
Chairman
Committee on Commerce, Science
and Transportation
512 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Hon. Maria Cantwell
Ranking Member
Committee on Commerce, Science
and Transportation
512 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

April 29, 2020

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Pelosi, Minority Leader Schumer, Chairman Wicker and Ranking Member Cantwell:

The undersigned education and related national associations write in strong support of the Emergency Educational Connections Act of 2020, to be introduced by Senators Markey, Van Hollen, Bennet, and Hassan. This bill would appropriate \$4 billion for an Emergency Connectivity Fund, administered through the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) E-Rate program, for schools and libraries to support distance and remote learning for millions of students without home internet access exacerbated by the COVID-19 emergency. This bill comes at a critical juncture: school buildings have closed in every state in the country in response to this pandemic; 43 states, 4 territories and the District of Columbia have already announced that their schools will not reopen this school year; and some states and districts are already considering expanding summer school options and planning for the possibility of interruptions to classroom teaching and learning next academic year. With an estimated 9 to 12 million students and some of their teachers currently lacking home internet access and unable to participate in online classes now and in the future, there is great need for Senator Markey and his colleagues' legislation. We strongly urge you to take up and pass this bill as part of COVID-19 relief package IV.

The COVID-19 national emergency has struck K-12 education especially hard. Several recent national and local articles have shone a bright light on the existing 'homework gap' students have experienced across the country as schools have shuttered. This inequity, among students who have Internet at home and those who don't, has kept several million students from participating in their education as it has moved online. Some schools have even decided to opt out of any online learning because of this inequity. A recent article in Mississippi Today highlights the technology challenges many rural students in that state face: "The closures present a unique set of challenges for rural schools, which serve 235,000 students in the state, according to national nonprofit Rural School and Community Trust. Online learning can be a challenge in some districts — statewide, almost one-fifth of Mississippi households do not have a computer and nearly one-third don't have broadband, the federal standard for internet speeds, according to Census Bureau data." Another recent article, from the Boston Globe, demonstrates that more urbanized states also face significant issues with unconnected students: "In Massachusetts, which has made strides in recent years to expand Internet access, 49,000 children under 18 still do not have service at home and more than 14,000 lack a computer at home, according to 2015 Census figures. The digital inequities remain so stark that education officials have moved away from the phrase 'online learning' and now call it 'remote learning.'"

Our organizations, which directly represent E-Rate program beneficiaries or are associated with those who do, believe that the E-Rate program is the best vehicle to disseminate funds quickly to schools and libraries for the purchase of Wi-Fi hotspots, modems, routers, connected devices and advanced information and technology services. The E-Rate program's successful equity-based 22-year history of keeping public and private schools and public libraries connected to the internet demonstrates why it is best positioned to disseminate critical emergency funds to schools and libraries – with priority to those with the greatest need. Having committed over \$50 billion in support to schools and libraries since its founding in 1998, the E-Rate certainly can handle processing promptly and effectively the \$4 billion in homework gap funding called for by Senator Markey's legislation, ensuring an equitable distribution.

Furthermore, we believe the benefits of using the existing E-Rate program outweigh other options. We are confident the FCC will be able to deliver on the bill's necessary expedited timeline, as well. As it has shown in its responses to other disasters, including hurricanes, the FCC can quickly move E-Rate support to affected schools and libraries, making the necessary tailored adjustments to the program needed during this emergency.

Finally, we thank Senator Markey, an original author of the E-Rate program, for his long-term leadership on this issue and for his intent to introduce the Emergency Educational Connections Act of 2020. We believe that the challenge facing millions of students across the country that lack home Internet access demands and requires a dedicated funding source, which Senator Markey's Emergency Connectivity Fund would provide. Without it, millions of students will be left behind.

Based on the foregoing, we urge you to ensure this this legislation is included in the next COVID funding package passed by Congress.

Sincerely,

AASA The School Superintendents Association
Advance CTE
Alliance for Excellent Education
American Federation of School Administrators
American Federation of Teachers, AFLCIO
American Library Association
American Psychological Association
American School Counselor Association
ASCD
Association for Career and Technical Education
Association of Educational Service Agencies
Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO)
Children's Health Fund
Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL)
Committee for Children
Common Sense Media
CoSN - Consortium for School Networking
Council for Exceptional Children
Council of Administrators of Special Education
Family Centered Treatment Foundation
First Focus Campaign for Children

Girls Inc.
IDEA Public Schools
International Society for Technology in Education
KIPP Foundation
Learning Forward
Magnet Schools of America
MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership
National Association for Music Education
National Association of Counties (NACo)
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Federally Impacted Schools (NAFIS)
National Association of Independent Schools
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Association of State Boards of Education
National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE)
National Catholic Educational Association
National Center for Families Learning
National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM)
National Education Association
National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform
National Rural Education Advocacy Consortium
National Rural Education Association
National School Boards Association (NSBA)
Parents as Teachers
Project Tomorrow
Public Advocacy for Kids (PAK)
SETDA (State Educational Technology Directors Association)
Stand for Children
Teach For America
The Education Trust