

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
Washington, DC 20515

April 8, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McConnell, Leader Schumer, and Leader McCarthy:

As you consider the next COVID-19 (coronavirus) relief package, we write to urge you to support dedicated resources for distance learning to guarantee that all children can continue their education during the pandemic. Without additional support from Congress, many students will be unable to continue their education during this uncertain time. As such, we request that the next coronavirus package include at least \$2 billion in E-Rate funds for schools and libraries to provide Wi-Fi hotspots or other devices with Wi-Fi capability to students without adequate connectivity in their homes.

The spread of the coronavirus within our nation's communities has strained our healthcare systems beyond capacity, shuttered local businesses, and closed schools nationwide, forcing a historic reliance on the internet to access the critical information needed to stem the impact of the pandemic. Yet, across the United States, millions of families lack reliable home access to broadband connectivity, and as of 2019, more than one in four rural residents do not have access to broadband.<sup>1</sup>

This lack of e-connectivity limits a student's ability to complete assignments at home and exacerbates what is commonly referred to as the "homework gap," leaving some of our most vulnerable Americans behind. The current public health crisis threatens to further exacerbate these historic inequities as more and more schools move to e-learning as a way of providing supplemental education even as nearly 12 million students nationwide lack reliable home access to broadband connectivity. While research shows that the "homework gap" alone can have serious impacts on a student's education experience, the current pandemic may result in these same students being unable to continue their education at all.

We believe the E-Rate program could provide much-needed relief for these students and ensure that they have the tools to continue their education both during this crisis and in the future. The E-Rate program was established in 1997 to help schools and libraries gain affordable access to the internet through

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<sup>1</sup> FCC 2019 Broadband Deployment Report, <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/FCC-19-44A1.pdf>

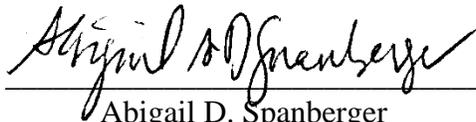
discounts ranging from 20-90% on telecommunication and internet service-related technologies. Since then, the E-Rate program has proven to be a critical partner in helping our nation's schools and libraries increase their access to reliable internet services. Providing additional funding for the E-Rate program to expand these services even further to cover adequate home internet access for students across the nation would be of immense help to students, schools, and families during this trying time.

The success of our students and the opportunities afforded to them should not be based on where they live. It is especially important that during a time of public health crisis, we take steps to ensure that all students can learn from home and that parents do not feel pressured to expose their children to contagions so that they can access public Wi-Fi to complete their schoolwork. While permanently addressing this digital divide caused by a lack of broadband access will take time and broad investments in infrastructure, Congress can help students impacted by the coronavirus public health crisis today by providing funds specifically dedicated to ensuring they have adequate home internet access.

We urge Congress to take immediate steps to close the "homework gap" and help America's students continue to learn during these uncertain times by providing the additional funding needed for the E-Rate program.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



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Abigail D. Spanberger  
Member of Congress

## **Support Broadband Funding in the Fourth Coronavirus Package**

### **List of Signatories**

James R. Langevin	Sanford D. Bishop, Jr.	Jared Golden
Barbara Lee	Elaine G. Luria	John Yarmuth
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