

United States Senate

March 22, 2020

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

The Honorable Roger Wicker
Chairman
Committee on Commerce, Science,
and Transportation
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader McConnell and Chairman Wicker:

We write to express our profound disappointment with the coronavirus relief package that Senate Republicans proposed today. In its current form, this legislation fails to provide sufficient funding to help ensure that all K-12 students have adequate home internet connectivity if their schools close due to the ongoing pandemic. We believe that Congress must provide robust resources for these purposes, in order to guarantee that all children are able to continue their education during the current public health emergency. Simply put, we cannot bail out the airline industry to the tune of tens of billions while providing only pennies for our nation's children.

The coronavirus pandemic has shone a bright light on the “homework gap” experienced by the 12 million students in this country who do not have internet access at home and are unable to complete their homework — at a time when more than 70% of educators assign schoolwork that requires internet access. Research has shown that the homework gap affects students in both rural and urban areas and disproportionately affects lower-income students and students of color. Students without internet access at home consistently score lower in reading, math, and science.

We are concerned that this existing inequity will only be exacerbated by the high number of schools that are suspending in-person classes and have transitioned to remote learning over the internet to protect the health of students, faculty, and staff. Children without connectivity are at risk of not only being unable to complete their homework during this pandemic, but being unable to continue their overall education. Congress must address this issue by providing additional financial support for home internet access in the next emergency relief package so that no child falls behind in their education.

We specifically request that you 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 at their home. The E-Rate program is, and has been for over two decades, an essential source of funding to connect the nation's schools and libraries to the internet. As the coronavirus pandemic develops, this program offers a solution that may help mitigate the impact on our most vulnerable families. We believe additional funding for E-Rate would greatly narrow the homework gap during the current crisis and help ensure that all students can continue to learn.

Congress must act in light of the unprecedented disruption that the coronavirus has created for our education system. We must work to close the homework gap and ensure that all students who need internet access have the connectivity they need to continue learning from home.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. Due to the closure of many Senate offices during the coronavirus outbreak, physical signatures are unavailable. The listed senators have asked to be signatories to this letter.

Sincerely,

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator

Jack Reed
United States Senator

Tim Kaine
United States Senator

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

Mark R. Warner
United States Senator

Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator

Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator

Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

Ron Wyden
United States Senator

Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator

Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator

Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator

Jacky Rosen
United States Senator

CC: The Honorable Charles E. Schumer, Minority Leader, United States Senate
The Honorable Maria Cantwell, Ranking Member, Committee on Commerce, Science,
and Transportation