



April 27, 2020

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

Dear Chairman Wicker:

Our organizations represent the school district and state education agency professionals responsible for equipping students and teachers with the technology, including broadband connections, required for learning. The unprecedented scale of the pandemic's impact on education – with over 50 million students displaced from their classrooms – has shined a new light on the nation's broadband infrastructure gaps. Our members are working to help their schools serve students and teachers at home, but far too many learners and educators – especially rural and low-income households – lack access to a broadband connection, an internet capable device, or both.

Federal support, through the E-rate program, is needed to ensure that all students and teachers have access to broadband during the pandemic and beyond. That is why our organizations recently endorsed the Emergency Educational Connections Act of 2020 (H.R. 6563). We encourage you to support this emergency E-rate funding. As Congress discusses education broadband needs as part of the next emergency spending bill, we respectfully ask you to consider two improvements to H.R. 6563.

- **Dedicated Connectivity Funding is Needed for Unserved Areas.** All students must be able to access broadband for learning. Unfortunately, many students live in areas that lack any broadband service. We were pleased when Congress passed the Broadband DATA Act, earlier this year, to better identify unserved regions, which will help communities comprehensively fill their broadband gaps. Our members, however, can already identify major trouble spots based on their past efforts to reach disconnected students. A portion of any emergency E-rate funding approved by Congress should be expressly set aside for meeting student and teacher needs in these and other unconnected regions. In addition, schools and other community anchor institutions should be empowered to fill these gaps independently. Funding should be available for network equipment, so

schools have the option to meet students' needs in areas where commercial providers do not offer service.

- **Make Education Cybersecurity an Eligible Use.** Cyberattacks have become a serious threat to the nation's school districts, including frequent ransomware attacks that have resulted in lost learning time and forfeited public funding. Districts are responsible for protecting vast amounts of confidential student and employee data and ransomware attacks can stop a school's work for days and weeks, but many districts lack the staff and technology required to effectively combat increasingly complex and frequent cyberattacks. This threat has been compounded by the rapid transition to universal online learning. Students are no longer mostly accessing school district networks from their classrooms, where they can be monitored and better protected. Now, many are using unsecured home networks or devices to access learning. Schools have had to move quickly to meet students' home learning needs, without fully required testing and refining of security measures. Emergency E-rate funding approved by Congress should help school districts and states deliver secure broadband that protect students and school district networks.

Finally, while we strongly support H.R. 6563, based on recent conversations with our members, we believe that Congress must provide much more than \$2 billion to meet this national need. For example, Funds for Learning estimates that \$5.25 billion in E-rate funding, including just over \$1 billion for cybersecurity, is needed to provide students living in the estimated 7.1 million families that lack broadband, with secure, connected learning devices for off-campus educational purposes.

Sincerely,

Keith Krueger
CEO
CoSN

Candice Dodson
Executive Director
SETDA