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May 4, 2020

U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

The National Education Association, along with more than 50 national education and related organizations, [call on Congress](#) to include \$4 billion for an Emergency Connectivity Fund, administrated through the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC's) E-Rate program for schools and libraries, to help close the digital divide by supporting distance and remote learning for students without home internet access during the COVID-19 pandemic.

With an estimated 9 to 12 million students and some of their teachers currently lacking home internet access and unable to participate in teaching and learning, the need is great for Senator Markey and his colleagues' legislation. We also strongly believe the E-Rate program is the best vehicle to disseminate these funds quickly to schools and libraries based on the program's successful equity-based 22-year history—with priority to those with the greatest need. Without permanently changing the existing E-Rate program, the FCC can quickly move this dedicated emergency funding for the homework gap through the E-Rate, making the necessary tailored adjustments to the program needed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We believe the challenge facing millions of students across the country experiencing the homework gap demands and requires a dedicated funding source to ensure continuity in teaching and learning, whether in the classroom or from home, through the upcoming academic year.

We strongly urge you to join Senators Markey, Van Hollen, Bennet, and Hassan to cosponsor their bill and ensure it is included in the next COVID-19 funding package passed by Congress. The text of their "Dear Colleague" letter follows.

Sincerely,

Marc Egan
Director of Government Relations
National Education Association

Co-Sponsors: Markey, Van Hollen, Bennet, Hassan, Booker

Dear Colleague,

We write to ask you to become an original cosponsor of the Emergency Educational Connections Act of 2020 (Senate companion to Congresswoman Meng’s H.R. 6563)*, legislation that dedicates \$4 billion in E-Rate funds to ensure that all K-12 students have adequate home internet connectivity during this pandemic.

Specifically, this bill would:

1. Provide \$4 billion in federal support for elementary and secondary schools and libraries, including tribal schools and libraries, to provide Wi-Fi hotspots, modems, routers, and internet-enabled devices (as well as internet service through such equipment) to students, staff, and patrons;
2. Allow schools and libraries to continue to use the equipment after the emergency period; and
3. Ensure schools and libraries prioritize support for those most in need, following the guidelines of the E-Rate program.

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 believe 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.

*Note: Our bill is a companion to the House bill, except for the appropriated amount. The House used an older figure (\$2 billion), that education groups developed believing the crisis would last only through this academic year. As more educators have come to realize the crisis will last far longer, need has only increased (see [attached supporter letter](#)).

To sign on or with questions, please contact Joseph_Wender@markey.senate.gov

Sincerely,

Senators Markey, Van Hollen, Bennet, Hassan