

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

April 24, 2020

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

When college campuses closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, students lost more than access to lecture halls and student unions; they lost stable housing, reliable sources of food, and connectivity to the internet for their learning.

Access to technology is crucial for today's students—96 percent of students report using the internet for school work¹, but a study by Microsoft in 2019 indicated that over 160 million American households don't have broadband internet². Lack of broadband disproportionately affects low-income communities, rural populations, and tribal nations³. Because today's students who relied on their college campuses for access to Wi-Fi and have now lost access to campus and other institutions such as libraries or coffee shops where they may have had internet connection, they are now facing new and overwhelming challenges to their learning. These challenges may cause students to lag behind in their coursework, drop out for the semester, or choose to not return in future semesters.

The most common issue given for not having reliable high-speed internet access is the cost of services⁴. As such, we are asking you to act swiftly to support today's students by bolstering broadband connectivity for postsecondary students through COVID-19 emergency response legislation.

1

<https://www.educause.edu/research-and-publications/books/educating-net-generation/convenience-communications-and-control-how-students-use-technology>

2

<https://blogs.microsoft.com/on-the-issues/2019/04/08/its-time-for-a-new-approach-for-mapping-broadband-data-to-better-serve-americans/>

3

<https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2018/12/rural-and-lower-income-counties-lag-nation-internet-subscription.html>

⁴ <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2019/demo/sehsd-wp2019-15.pdf>

Specifically, Congress should provide increased funding for the E-Rate program—in addition to adding more money for the program for K-12 schools and libraries—and expand E-Rate to benefit students enrolled in postsecondary education. This additional appropriation should allow institutions of higher education to facilitate mobile broadband hotspots to higher education students with financial need.

Secondly, Congress should make changes to the Lifeline program by allowing students who are eligible for the Pell Grant to be eligible for services through the program. Appropriations to the Lifeline program should also be increased to facilitate a larger dollar amount of services that are covered for program recipients, including broadband.

Supporting today's students by providing access to resources that are critical for their learning—including broadband—is paramount during and in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis. We ask you to make necessary changes and appropriations to E-Rate and Lifeline at this time to support today's students, and thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Higher Learning Advocates
Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges
Achieving the Dream
ACT's Center for Equity in Learning
America Forward
Beyond 12
Brandman University
Breakthrough Central Texas
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
Chiefs for Change
Coalition on Adult Basic Education
College Forward
CollegeSpring
Complete College America
Cornell Student Assembly
Distance Education Accrediting Commission
DVP-PRAXIS LTD
Ed2work
Eye to Eye National
Foundation Communities
Generation Hope
Higher Education Policy Program at New America
Higher Learning Commission
Hon. George Miller, Former Member of Congress
Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice

Institute for Higher Education Policy
Latino U College Access
Middle States Commission on Higher Education
National Center for Learning Disabilities
National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment
National Skills Coalition
New England Commission of Higher Education
Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities
Northwestern Health Sciences University
OneGoal
Philadelphia Council AFL-CIO
Public Knowledge
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges
St. Louis Graduates
State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO)
Student Veterans of America
Students United
Swipe Out Hunger
The Campaign for College Opportunity
The Education Trust
The Graduate! Network, Inc.
The Learning Accelerator
The Opportunity Network
Transcend
uAspire
University of Louisville
WASC Senior College & University Commission (WSCUC)
Young Invincibles

cc: The Honorable Richard Shelby
The Honorable Patrick Leahy
The Honorable Nita Lowey
The Honorable Kay Granger
The Honorable Jerry Moran
The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen
The Honorable José Serrano
The Honorable Robert Aderholt