Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 15, 2026

The Honorable Brendan Carr
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
45 L Street, N.E.
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Carr,

The Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) proposal to eliminate the E-Rate program or restrict support to rural areas would dismantle one of the nation's most successful broadband programs and sever a critical lifeline for schools and libraries across the country. For nearly 30 years, E-Rate has helped close the digital divide and ensure that students and library patrons can access the internet regardless of their income or ZIP code. Ending or sharply curtailing E-Rate would impose severe costs on schools and libraries while weakening economic growth, undermining American technological leadership, and jeopardizing national security. Yet, the Commission is now using legitimate concerns about children's screen time to justify undermining this successful program. That is unacceptable. The Commission should abandon these proposals and preserve E-Rate as the universal program that Congress intended.

E-Rate transformed connectivity in American schools and libraries and remains one of the federal government's clearest universal-service successes. Congress created the program in 1996 to ensure that "all public and nonprofit elementary and secondary school classrooms . . . and libraries" — in rural and urban communities alike — could have affordable internet access.[1] For nearly three decades, Commissions led by both parties have administered E-Rate as a lawful exercise of authority granted by Congress under section 254 of the Communications Act. In 1994, just 35 percent of public schools and 3 percent of instructional rooms were connected to the internet; by 2000, 98 percent of public schools and 77 percent of instructional rooms were connected.[2] That progress has continued: between 2013 and 2019, the number of students with access to broadband meeting the FCC's classroom connectivity benchmark increased from 4 million to 46.3 million, and 99 percent of public schools obtained fiber connections.[3] Similarly, before the 1996 Act, only 21 percent of public libraries were connected to the internet; today virtually all libraries offer internet access.[4] E-Rate helped make — and continues to make —

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[1] 47 U.S.C. § 254(h)(2)(A).

[2] Anne Cattagni & Elizabeth Farris, National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, *Internet Access in U.S. Public Schools and Classrooms: 1994–2000*, NCES 2001-071, tbls. 1–2 (May 2001).

[3] EducationSuperHighway, *2019 State of the States: The Classroom Connectivity Gap Is Closed* (2019), https://www.educationsuperhighway.org/wp-content/uploads/2019-State-of-the-States-Full-Report-EducationSuperHighway-1.pdf.

[4] Charles R. McClure et al., *Public Libraries and the Internet: Study Results, Policy Issues, and Recommendations*, U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science i (June 1994); Institute of Museum and Library Services, *Workforce Development*, https://www.imls.gov/about/learn-about-imls/priority-

reliable internet service foundational infrastructure at schools and libraries, rather than a privilege reserved for wealthier communities.

E-Rate is not a legacy program whose work is finished. In 2025, E-Rate helped more than 158,000 schools and libraries pay recurring broadband bills, increase bandwidth, maintain secure internal Wi-Fi networks, and replace aging infrastructure.[5] Schools and libraries also rely on the internet to support essential communications, networked security, and building-management systems, including heating and cooling controls. As a result, eliminating E-Rate would force schools and libraries across the country to absorb those connectivity costs, which many cannot afford. That would mean diverting resources from teachers, staff, instructional materials, library services, and other basic needs or allowing networks to become slower and less reliable.[6] Students could lose access to online instruction, assessments, research tools, and school communications, while library patrons who lack reliable broadband at home would lose a critical point of access. Ending E-Rate would therefore disrupt the basic operation of modern schools and libraries and deepen existing educational and digital inequities.

Restricting E-Rate to rural communities would be no less destructive and would directly contradict the program's universal-service mission. Urban and suburban communities can face profound poverty and serve large numbers of students whose families cannot afford reliable internet access. There is no reason that a low-income rural school should receive E-Rate support while a similar, low-income urban school should be categorically ineligible for the program. Moreover, the current program already recognizes the distinct challenges facing rural schools and libraries by considering both rural status and participation in the National School Lunch Program when calculating discounts, with support ranging from 20 to 90 percent.[7] Excluding urban communities would strip support from many of the nation's highest-poverty schools and libraries, forcing them to divert scarce resources from instruction and other essential services simply to maintain basic connectivity. A student's access to educational opportunity should not depend on whether the FCC considers that child's community sufficiently rural.

Beyond exacerbating educational inequalities, eliminating or limiting E-Rate would also weaken economic growth and national security. As FCC Commissioner Anna Gomez stated, "As the United States competes globally to lead in artificial intelligence and advanced technologies, the importance of E-Rate has never been greater."[8] Schools and libraries help develop the next generation of engineers, scientists, and cybersecurity professionals, including in communities that have historically lacked access to those opportunities. Cutting E-Rate would narrow that

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areas/workforce-development (reporting that 99.4 percent of public libraries provide internet access, based on the 2021 Public Libraries Survey).

[5] Universal Service Administrative Company, *2025 Annual Report* 6 (2026), https://www.usac.org/wp-content/uploads/about/documents/annual-reports/2025/USAC_2025_Annual_Report.pdf.

[6] Letter from AASA, The School Superintendents Association, to the Federal Communications Commission, WC Docket No. 26-133 (filed July 10, 2026), https://www.fcc.gov/ecfs/document/26110007859/1.

[7] 47 C.F.R. § 54.505(c).

[8] Statement of Commissioner Anna M. Gomez, *Ensuring Children's Safe Use of Screens and E-Rate-Funded Services et al.*, WC Docket Nos. 26-133, 13-184, 21-93 & 21-455, FCC 26-41, at 1, 3 (June 25, 2026).

talent pipeline. Maintaining connectivity in every school and library is therefore an investment in America's technological leadership, economic competitiveness, and national security.

The FCC's effort to justify cutting or eliminating E-Rate under the guise of protecting children online does not withstand scrutiny. We strongly support measures to protect children online and address concerns around excessive screen time. But cutting E-Rate is not a child-safety measure. E-Rate funds broadband connectivity — not laptops, tablets, applications, or online content[9] — and recipients must already comply with the Children's Internet Protection Act, including by using filtering and blocking tools, adopting internet-safety policies, and educating students about appropriate online behavior.[10] States and local communities, meanwhile, are developing targeted policies governing when and how students use devices in schools — an appropriate way to address screen-time concerns, rather than cutting broadband support. The Commission should not use child safety as a pretext to dismantle the secure, managed broadband infrastructure that schools and libraries need to educate students and help them navigate the digital world safely.

This proceeding is the latest step in a broader FCC campaign to weaken E-Rate. In September 2025, the Commission eliminated support for school and library Wi-Fi hotspot lending programs[11] and reversed its decision to fund Wi-Fi service on school buses.[12] In April 2026, it adopted a new bidding portal that will add administrative burdens for schools and libraries seeking E-Rate support.[13] The Commission is now escalating this pattern by questioning whether E-Rate should exist at all. The Trump FCC's strategy is clear: dismantle E-Rate piece by piece and widen the digital divide for students and families across the country, raising costs for the communities that can least afford it.

For these reasons, the Commission should withdraw its proposal to eliminate E-Rate, restrict eligibility based on geography, or otherwise weaken support for schools and libraries.

Thank you for your prompt consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,

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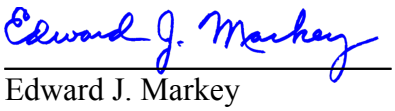
[9] *See Schools and Libraries Universal Support Mechanism*, WC Docket 13-184, DA 25-1069, Funding Year 2026 Eligible Services List (ESL) at 13 (Dec. 17, 2025).

[10] 47 U.S.C. § 254(h)(5)–(6), (l).

[11] *Addressing the Homework Gap Through the E-Rate Program*, WC Docket No. 21-31, Order on Reconsideration, FCC 25-62 (Sept. 30, 2025).

[12] *Modernizing the E-Rate Program for Schools and Libraries*, WC Docket No. 13-184, Declaratory Ruling, FCC 25-63 (Sept. 30, 2025).

[13] *Promoting Fair and Open Competitive Bidding in the E-Rate Program; Schools and Libraries Universal Service Support Mechanism*, Report and Order and Order on Reconsideration, FCC 26-30 (May 1, 2026).



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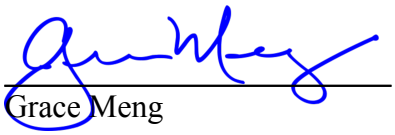

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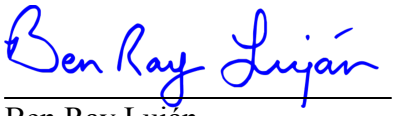

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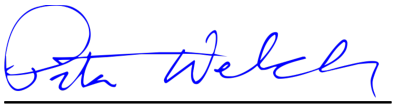

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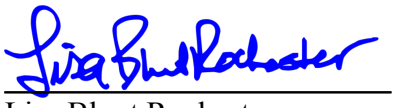

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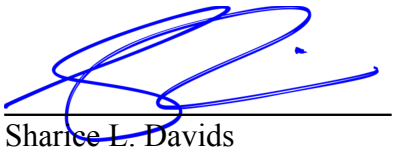

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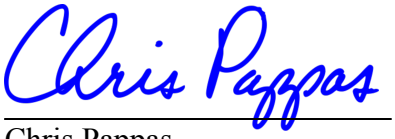

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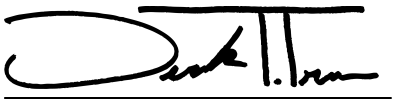

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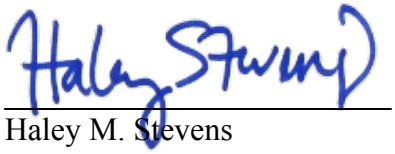

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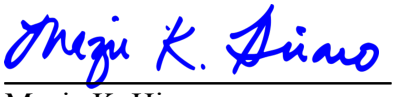

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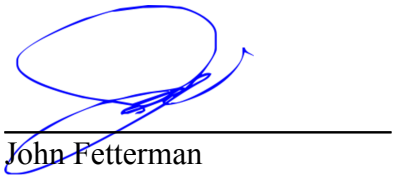

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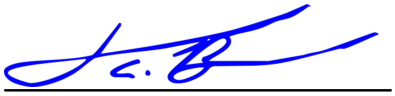

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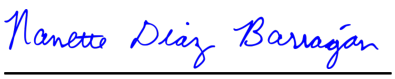

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