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CONGRESSIONAL CIVIL
JUSTICE CAUCUS



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

July 10, 2014

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
CHAIRMAN

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE
VICE CHAIRMAN

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
LIVESTOCK, RURAL DEVELOPMENT,
AND CREDIT

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
DEPARTMENT OPERATIONS, OVERSIGHT,
AND NUTRITION

DEPUTY WHIP

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The Honorable Thomas Wheeler
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Wheeler:

As you know, the passage of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 codified a long standing policy commitment to ensure universal service in the provision of telecommunications service. Also included in this Act was the establishment of the schools and libraries, or E-rate, program. Under this program, telecommunications service, Internet access, and internal connections are provided at discounts ranging from 20% to 90% to eligible schools and libraries. I write to share my concerns with your proposal to modernize the E-Rate program, which is scheduled to be considered by the Federal Communications Commission at a meeting on July 11, 2014.

One component of this plan is to promote Wi-Fi and phase down support of non-broadband services. In rural areas of our country, including in the Sixth District of Virginia, basic Internet connectivity is a challenge, let alone harnessing Wi-Fi. Should the FCC begin to limit their expenditures on basic non-broadband services, rural schools and libraries may see their access to Internet decreased - the exact opposite goal of the E-Rate program.

Additionally, reports that your proposal includes altering the E-Rate program's funding formula from a needs-based system to a per-student or per-square foot formula are concerning. These types of measures would likely disadvantage schools and libraries in rural communities as the need for better telecommunications services grows.

I ask that you reconsider this proposal and work with those who will be directly impacted by changes in the E-Rate program. It is clear that technologies have changed greatly since the passage of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, and I am encouraged that a conversation to modernize the E-Rate program has begun. It is important, however, that we recognize the challenges still faced in many rural parts of our nation before making one-size-fits-all changes.

I look forward to hearing how the FCC will renew their commitment to serve all eligible schools and libraries and work with both urban and rural communities before implementing any modernizing changes.

Sincerely,

Bob Goodlatte
Member of Congress



CONGRESSMAN BOB GOODLATTE

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