



Kentucky Association of
Elementary School Principals



Louisville
Urban League



Family & Children's Place



ERTIA UNLIMITED

May 20, 2020

Dear members of Kentucky's congressional delegation:

Two months have passed since businesses and schools across the Commonwealth began shutting their doors due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As educators and businesses began adapting, one thing became abundantly clear: the internet is as necessary as electricity and plumbing for our daily lives. As social distancing became a matter of life and death, a connection to the world outside our homes became vital to our economy, our education system, and our way of life.

In 2017, census data showed that Kentucky ranks 44th in the nation for broadband access. Nearly 25 percent of our households do not have a subscription for high-speed internet, and more than 15 percent do not have a computer, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Among households without home internet, one-third say it simply is too expensive. In many rural parts of the state, high-quality internet connections can be hard to find, whether or not you have the funds to pay for it.

As a member of Kentucky's congressional delegation, you have a powerful platform to ensure all our families have internet access. The Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, along with a coalition of education leaders from across the state, is encouraging Congress to fund universal broadband internet. Schools and businesses may be closed, but we must ensure that all of Kentucky's families have the tools they need to learn and earn online, during the pandemic and beyond.

One possible funding vehicle is the federal E-Rate program, which has historically made internet funding affordable for schools and libraries. However, funding for internet access could also come through another coronavirus relief package, similar to the CARES Act. Regardless of the funding vehicle, ensuring universal access to broadband internet for all families is an imperative.

This issue effects all of us – both now and in the future. Having more Kentuckians who have internet access means more of our citizens can work remotely – having an immediate impact on our economy. Having more

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students with internet access means they will be better prepared for the jobs of the future. It also affects our healthcare, as more and more healthcare providers have started offering more telehealth sessions to reduce germ spread in their offices. Internet access, combined with a computer or connected device, enables Kentuckians to engage in the basics of life whether it's ordering food and retail products online, visiting a doctor, or working and learning at home.

Lack of access to broadband internet is an inequity that has persisted for far too long. The global pandemic we face now, has brought this inequity into stark relief and Congress has the power to fix it. As we navigate an increasingly digital "new normal," where the internet and broadband networks are pervasive, we must ensure that all Kentucky families have access to the infrastructure that supports remote learning and remote work. Universal access to the information superhighway is necessary for all.

Sincerely,

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