

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 20, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Schumer,

As you negotiate a third relief package in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we urge you to include dedicated funding in support of expanding digital distance learning and closing the homework gap. It is critical that schools are able to provide students in need with devices that can access the internet. Without access to devices that are capable of connecting to the internet, these children will be unable to complete their schoolwork and assignments and will be victims of the digital divide.

According to the Joint Economic Committee an estimated 12 million children do not have access to the internet at home. While approximately 70% of teachers assign homework that requires internet access outside of school, an estimated one in five children do not have access to internet at home or a device to help them access the internet. 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.

In an effort to reduce the infection rates and community spread of COVID-19 and in compliance with the guidance provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, school systems in at least 45 states have announced complete or partial school closures. These closures represent at least 114,000 public and private schools and 52.6 million students. As schools create new learning platforms they must ensure that their new policies provide equal online access for all students in compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504), Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Title II).

At the urging of many in Congress, the Federal Communications Commission has used its emergency authority to make it easier for schools and libraries to acquire equipment to give to their students. But the Commission's funding is capped. Congress must act in light of this

unprecedented disruption of K-12 and higher education. We must work to close the homework gap and ensure that all students who need access have access and all students who need devices have devices. We cannot afford for students to be left behind during this pandemic.

We look forward to working with you on this issue, and we are hopeful that you will include a meaningful solution to the homework gap in any relief package.

Sincerely,

/s/Chris Van Hollen

/s/Edward J. Markey

/s/Richard Blumenthal

/s/Amy Klobuchar

/s/Angus King

/s/Mark R. Warner

/s/Bernard Sanders

/s/Cory A. Booker

/s/Robert P. Casey

/s/Richard J. Durbin

/s/Jacky Rosen

/s/Kamala D. Harris