

**September 14, 2016**

Dear Members of Congress,

We support the schools, healthcare providers, libraries and other anchor institutions that serve as the gateways to their communities, providing essential Internet services to students, patients, patrons and underprivileged people. In order to meet our communities' needs, we depend on access to affordable, high-capacity broadband connections that often do not exist, especially in rural and non-competitive markets.

For this reason, we are pleased that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is moving forward with a plan to address the broken "business data services" (BDS) market, also known as the "special access" market. One of the proposals on the table is to reduce special access prices by 15% over the next two years, and others have called for even greater price reductions. These efforts are critical to our ability to serve our communities, and we encourage you to support the FCC's efforts to reform this marketplace without delay.

The 2010 National Broadband Plan called for every community to have affordable gigabit level broadband to anchor institutions by the year 2020. While we have made significant progress in the last six years, there is much more work to be done to meet that goal. The American Library Association reports that 42% of libraries still have a broadband connection of less than 10 Mbps, which is just one percent of the capacity called for in the National Broadband Plan. Forty-one percent of schools do not meet the short-term connectivity goals established by the FCC, leaving 21 million schoolchildren without adequate broadband connectivity to engage in online learning. Health providers outside of urban areas are 34% less likely to have a 50 Mbps connection than their urban counterparts.

The symptoms of this distorted marketplace are acutely felt by the institutions that need these services most. With declining budgets, our institutions often cannot afford to pay the excessive prices charged for high-capacity broadband access. The FCC's policies adopted over a decade ago were based on the theory that competition would develop to bring prices down. Unfortunately, that competition has not come to pass. According to data collected by the FCC, the large majority of BDS customers do not have competitive choices for their broadband services. That means that every interaction — a Skype lecture in the classroom, a tablet using the library's Wi-Fi, a desktop terminal at the nurse's station — will at some point travel over broadband "pipes" owned by just a few companies who do not compete with one another. The monopoly or duopoly control of the high-capacity broadband marketplace means that these companies are unlikely to provide competitive prices to the institutions that need it most.

Communities are clamoring for better, faster, more affordable broadband to support their public institutions, but we need the FCC's help. The FCC has undertaken the most comprehensive data collection in the Commission's history. We applaud Chairman Tom

Wheeler's proposal to seek a technology neutral approach to address this distorted market and foster competition that will result in more network build-outs, more affordable prices and faster speeds for our schools, libraries and health care institutions. We believe it is important for the FCC to adopt a plan covering common carriers serving the general public that leads to lower prices and more competitive markets. The FCC has been examining this market for several years, and it has gathered more data than ever before that demonstrates the lack of competition in this market. On behalf of the undersigned and the countless people that rely upon our organizations, we encourage you to support the FCC's reforms of this critical marketplace this fall.

Sincerely,

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