



September 15, 2014

The Honorable Tom Wheeler
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Re: Mayors' Support of E-Rate Efforts, *In the Matter of Modernizing the E-rate Program for Schools and Libraries*, Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, WC Docket No. 13-184 (Further Notice)

Dear Chairman Wheeler and Commissioners:

We write to you today as mayors representing population and education centers across the country that are beneficiaries of the E-Rate program. We applaud the Commission's commitment to modernizing the Universal Service Program for Schools and Libraries or "E-Rate" program. Supporting broadband access in our schools and libraries is a critically important aspect of efforts to close the digital divide and address persistent inequity.

The United States is a country that has long valued opportunity, fairness, and equality. Yet, too many of our residents are falling behind. Mayors from around the nation are taking action in response to this challenge. On August 11, 2014, members of the United States Conference of Mayors from across the nation gathered at Gracie Mansion in New York City to form the Cities of Opportunities Task Force. The group adopted a [Commitment to Action](#)¹ and appointed the mayors of New York City and Boston as Chair and Vice Chair respectively. More than 35 mayors committed to take local action to address unequal access to affordable, high-speed Internet connections for low-income residents. The Task Force embraces the following strategies to achieve digital equity and avoid educational disparity:

- ***Provide for 21st-century broadband and bridge the digital divide:*** Work to ensure that 21st-century broadband services are provided to all residents, including lower income residents and start-up businesses. Work to provide education and training to low-income residents, people of color, and women to ensure technological efficacy, creating new opportunities.
- ***Broadband advocacy and initiative:*** Advocate for federal programs and initiatives that bolster technological innovation, and accelerate and diversify the workforce pipeline in technology for low-income individuals and people of color.
- ***Promote high-quality education:*** Address the inequality in school systems and close the early childhood education achievement gaps to create opportunities for every child and better prepare our 21st-century workforce.

We file this letter to reaffirm the prior pledges that mayors have made in support of a constructive dialogue to increase the size of the E-Rate program. Equal access to the Internet has

¹ See U.S. Conference of Mayors, Cities of Opportunity Task Force, Cities of Opportunity Task Force Commitment to Action, available at <http://usmayors.org/CitiesofOpportunityLetters/Commitment%20to%20Action.pdf>.

become a basic necessity in the United States and other parts of the developed world. Mayors understand that while program management and operating efficiencies are important, the size of the program has never been equal to the task at hand, and they have issued calls for full funding of the program that back to 1999.² In 2005, mayors called for E-Rate to be exempt from Anti-Deficiency Act³ as a means of ensuring that E-rate funding was protected. As recently as March 17th of this year, the United States Conference of Mayors filed comments with the Commission [supporting the Commission's efforts to modernize E-Rate and increase the size of the fund.](#)⁴

The long-standing commitment of local chief executives to enhancing the E-Rate program reflects an understanding of the integral role the program plays in classrooms and reading rooms across the country. It provides critically important connectivity for the institutions that are best positioned to increase broadband access and adoption. In school settings, high-speed Internet access allows for the delivery of high-quality, individualized instruction and the use of innovative and engaging teaching tools. In libraries, broadband connections allow local residents who lack access at their homes to find education, employment, health, entertainment and other information online. But current resources are not sufficient. At a minimum, as [Commissioner Rosenworcel](#) has suggested,⁵ current funding levels should be indexed to inflation to ensure the program's purchasing power. But we urge the Commission to go beyond this, making sizeable additional investments in a program that has only grown in importance in the 18 years since it was established.

We urge the Commission to act to modernize the E-Rate program and expand access to the Internet in our cities' schools and libraries. As our cities recover from one of the largest economic crises in our country's history and shifting demographics demand a commitment to equity and opportunity, the imperative to invest in high-speed Internet connections for these critically important institutions has never been more greater.

Sincerely,



Martin J. Walsh
Mayor
City of Boston



Bill de Blasio
Mayor
City of New York



Charlie Hales
Mayor
City of Portland, OR

² See Press Release, U.S. Conference of Mayors, U.S. Mayors Push for Full E-Rate Funding (May 26, 1999), *available at* <http://www.usmayors.org/pressreleases/documents/erate.htm>.

³ See Resolution, U.S. Conference of Mayors, Permanent Fix for the E-Rate and the Universal Service Fund: Exempting It From the Anti-Deficiency Act (2005), *available at* http://www.usmayors.org/resolutions/73rd_conference/ed_01.asp.

⁴ See Letter from U.S. Conference of Mayors to Chairman Tom Wheeler (March 17, 2014) *available at* <http://usmayors.org/E-rateletter/USCM3-17-14E-rateLetterChairmanWheeler.pdf>.

⁵ See Statement of Commissioner Rosenworcel Approving in Part, Concurring in Part, Re: Modernizing the E-Rate Program for Schools and Libraries, WC Docket 13-184, *available at* https://apps.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-328172A5.pdf.