The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
317 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

October 27, 2022

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader Schumer, Minority Leader McConnell, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

The undersigned 65 education and related national organizations respectfully ask for Congress to replenish the Emergency Connectivity Fund (ECF), administered by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). Providing a $1 billion appropriation in FY 2023 would be an important first step towards achieving that goal.

As you know, the ECF was established in the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 to allow schools and libraries to provide students, teachers and library patrons with devices and internet service at home. As of now, the FCC has committed more than $6 billion in program funding provided by Congress to connect more than 14 million students and teachers,[1] a significant step toward addressing the well-documented k-12 digital divide. A breakdown by state of ECF funding allocations is available here.

Demand for this program is clearly high. In the final application window, which closed this past Spring, the FCC received requests for $2.8 billion in ECF funds, which was more than double the amount remaining in the program. Without additional funding, many of these requests will not be met, leaving millions of students disconnected at a time when learning loss and teacher shortages are leading concerns. We cannot let this happen.

Although thankfully students are back in school buildings, they still need access to robust devices and high-speed internet at home to succeed academically. Once ECF support ends, schools and libraries will struggle to meet this need. Here are some of their stories:

- **Lower Yukon School District, in Mountain Village, Alaska**, used their Emergency Connectivity Funding to pay for infrastructure to extend affordable internet access to the homes of students and teachers If the ECF funding ends in 2023, "…while the district's teachers and students will still need home access to the Internet, without a new source of funding, it will be out of reach." The fact remains that residential Internet in remote Alaska is simply not affordable. ECF made the critical infrastructure affordable, and it would be a waste of taxpayer dollars to just let that infrastructure go unused if ECF funding ends.

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[1] https://www.fcc.gov/emergency-connectivity-fund

- **PXU Digital Academy in Phoenix, Arizona** used the ECF to purchase laptops and hotspots for their students and teachers for the 2021-2022 school year. If the program is discontinued, "PXU will have to look towards other funding sources to continue to provide laptops as part of [their] 1:1 initiative for every student to have the tools (laptop and hotspot) they need to be able to access and complete their courses as well as interact virtually with teachers and peers." The lack of access to these resources "creates barriers to completing homework, class assignments, graduation and developing real-world work based skills."
- **Oakland Unified School District in California** states about ECF: "At the start of the Pandemic only 12% of students from low-income backgrounds had access to a computer and internet at home. ECF transformed digital access for our 34,000 students, enabling our schools - as trusted community institutions - to provide school-loaned laptops and hotspots, essential the tools of a 21st century education. We've come too far to turn back now. Our students deserve equal access."
- **All Saints Catholic School in Bangor, Maine** was able to use ECF support to purchase 1:1 laptops for students in grades K-8 through the pandemic: "We were able to make a bulk request for state-of-the-art laptops and travel bags to allow students to get them home and back to school safely. Throughout the year many students got Covid and had to isolate and miss 5- 10 days of school. Nearly all children were well enough to continue to participate in their daily classes through Google Classroom due to mild symptoms. The laptops allowed this to happen without interruption in most cases. Teachers were also provided MacBooks for home use so they could continue to deliver instruction when remote learning was required. Normally a request like this would take our school 5 or more years to complete. With the ECF grant, we requested all that we needed at one time!"
- **Baltimore County Public Schools in Maryland** has found ECF funding to have been instrumental in ensuring that all of our students who need high-speed internet receive it. "We are a mixed urban/rural school district/County, with varying needs of students from families not being able to afford high-speed internet in their homes, to families who live out in the countryside where high-speed copper or fiber services are not available at their homes. We have been able to utilize the ECF funding to provide equal access to any family who needed it, thus balancing the availability of high-speed mobile internet to any family who requested the service. The continuation of ECF-provided funding for the purpose of outfitting our buses, which transport approximately 80,000 students per day will help to extend the learning from home to school in the morning, and from school to home in the evenings. This will provide students access to educational resources no matter if the student only has a five-minute ride to/from school, or if the student has a thirty+ minute ride to/from school."
- **Rochester City School District in New York** utilized over $11.5M in funding from ECF and EducationSuperHighway's Bridge to Broadband Program to accurately identify all unconnected students in the district and cover the costs of laptops, tablets, wi-fi hotspots, modems, routers, and broadband connectivity purchases for off-campus use by students and school staff during the pandemic. Rochester City School Districts' efforts and the funding provided by ECF ensured that all students, regardless of zip code or circumstance, had equitable access to the internet and the opportunity to continue learning.
- **Cypress-Fairbanks ISD (CFISD) in Texas** made the decision to provide every student a Chromebook device in 2020. In order to provide 118,000 students with a Chromebook device,

"our district purchased approximately 75,000 Chromebook devices in addition to our existing inventory. CFISD has utilized the ECF funding to implement a replacement cycle for our 1:1 program as our older Chromebook devices begin to reach the point that they no longer receive operating system updates. The ECF program has afforded us the opportunity to purchase replacement devices; therefore, keeping students connected and playing a significant role in closing the homework gap."

- **Harris County Public Library in Houston, Texas** conducted the largest Emergency Connectivity Fund tablet (15,000) and MiFi device (40,000) distribution program of any public library in the country. With more than 13 percent of households in Harris County lacking access to the internet, it is essential that the ECF program be continued and that additional funding be available to help continue meeting the critical need of our patrons who depend on this program for their internet connectivity.

These and other stories like them show that this program is addressing the critical needs of schools and libraries across the country who are struggling to keep students, teachers and library patrons connected in an increasingly digital world. We therefore strongly urge Congress to replenish ECF, starting with an appropriation of $1 billion of funding this year to continue the ECF program. Please do not let millions of students, from rural and low-income households, fall back into the digital divide.

Sincerely,

AASA, The School Superintendents Association
African American Mayors Association
Afterschool Alliance
All4Ed
American Federation of School Administrators
American Federation of Teachers
American Library Association
American Psychological Association
American School Counselor Association
Association of Educational Service Agencies
Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO)
Baltimore County Public Schools, Maryland
Chiefs for Change
Code.org
Common Sense
Consortium for School Networking
Council for Affordable and Rural Housing
Council of Chief State School Officers
EducationSuperhighway
The Education Trust
Family Centered Treatment Foundation
Girlstart
IGNITE Worldwide
Institute for Educational Leadership

International Society for Technology in Education
Joint National Committee for Languages
Learning Forward
Magnet Schools of America
MENTOR
Multicultural Media, Telecom and Internet Council
National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement
National Association for Music Education
National Association for Pupil Transportation
National Association of Counties (NACo)
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Federally Impacted Schools
National Association of Housing Cooperatives
National Association of Independent Schools
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE)
National Catholic Educational Association
National Coalition for Technology in Education and Training
National Council for Languages and International Studies
National Council of Teachers of English
National Council of Teachers of Mathematics
National Council for the Social Studies
National Education Association
National PTA
National Rural Education Advocacy Consortium
National Rural Education Association
National School Boards Association
National Science Teaching Association (NSTA)
#OaklandUndivided
Organizations Concerned About Rural Education
Project Tomorrow
Public Advocacy for Kids
Schools, Health & Libraries Broadband Coalition
Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers
State Educational Technology Directors Association
State E-rate Coordinators Alliance
Teach for America
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Committee on Catholic Education
Universal Technical Institute
US Ignite

cc: Senate Commerce Committee Chair Maria Cantwell
        Senate Commerce Committee Ranking Member Roger Wicker

House Commerce Committee Chair Frank Pallone
House Commerce Committee Ranking Member Cathy McMorris Rogers
Senate Appropriations Committee Chair Pat Leahy
Senate Appropriations Committee Chair Richard Shelby
House Appropriations Committee Chair Rosa DeLauro
House Appropriations Committee Ranking Member Kay Granger

Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin