

FRANK PALLONE, JR., NEW JERSEY
CHAIRMAN

GREG WALDEN, OREGON
RANKING MEMBER

ONE HUNDRED SIXTEENTH CONGRESS

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE

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Majority (202) 225-2927

Minority (202) 225-3641

June 4, 2020

The Honorable Frank Pallone, Jr.
Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mike Doyle
Chairman
Subcommittee on Communications
and Technology
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Pallone and Chairman Doyle:

We write to urge you to hold a hearing to examine ways to close the digital divide so that all Americans may experience the economic, educational, and health care benefits that access to broadband service provides. The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified the need for connectivity, as millions of Americans transition to working remotely. Children need broadband to be able to do their schoolwork from home.¹ Some Americans who do not have access to reliable broadband connections travel to the nearest parking lot to be able to connect to the Internet. It is our duty to examine these issues and work in a bipartisan manner to close the digital divide.

Earlier this year, the Subcommittee on Communications and Technology held a hearing titled “Empowering and Connecting Communities through Digital Equity and Internet Adoption,” and heard from knowledgeable witnesses about barriers to broadband adoption, including digital literacy, affordability, and access to devices.² In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, communications companies have stepped up to address these barriers, and many have responded by offering free or reduced services, continuing services for those unable to pay, and offering additional data to make sure Americans remained connected during this time. Other companies have donated devices to make sure children are able to do their homework.

¹ See, “The FCC should send Wi-Fi hotspots to schools to close the homework gap,” The Verge, March 17, 2020. Available at: <https://www.theverge.com/2020/3/17/21183589/fcc-commissioner-jessica-rosenworcel-homework-gap-editorial-wifi-hotspots-coronavirus>

² Hearing entitled, “Empowering and Connecting Communities Through Digital Equity and Internet Adoption”, Subcommittee on Communications and Technology, January 29, 2020. Available at: <https://republicans-energycommerce.house.gov/hearings/empowering-and-connecting-communities-through-digital-equity-and-internet-adoption/>

The Honorable Frank Pallone, Jr.

The Honorable Mike Doyle

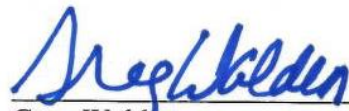
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Unfortunately, this pandemic has brought to light the consequences for the millions of Americans who did not have access to broadband in their communities before the current crisis. It is critical to examine potential solutions to close the homework gap and simultaneously take steps to reduce regulatory barriers to close the digital divide. These actions will promote competition and broadband infrastructure deployment that will long outlast the current crisis.

Given the pressing nature of this matter, we request that you hold a hearing as soon as possible to discuss these important issues. We are committed to working with you in a bipartisan manner to address these issues, but we must have a hearing to find out where the problems persist. By taking these steps, we can make sure that all Americans are connected.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. If you have any questions, please contact Kate O'Connor with the Minority Committee Staff at (202) 225-3641.

Sincerely,



Greg Walden
Republican Leader
Committee on Energy and Commerce



Robert E. Latta
Republican Leader
Subcommittee on Communications and
Technology