

Chairman Ajit Pai  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12th Street SW,   
Washington, DC 20554

October 19, 2017

Dear Chairman Pai,

I am writing today in response to the Federal Communications Commission’s (FCC) Public Notice which, among other things, considers changes to the E-Rate program. Before delving into my response to the proposed changes, I want to thank the FCC for your continued support for the E-Rate program and for the critical programmatic and policy changes the commission adopted in 2014. The E-Rate program provides critical discounts to assist schools (like mine) to obtain affordable telecommunications and internet access.

Mehlville School District has approximately a 30% free and reduced lunch rate and finds itself in a landlocked area with limited growth and opportunity of increasing a tax base. E-Rate funding has played a critical role in a helping achieve our technology goals of providing connectivity for students in the classroom setting, including expanding devices for each student and internet access throughout the district.

I believe the E-Rate program is a program succeeding in its mission. As the FCC moves forward with this public notice, it is prudent to remain focused on the fact that E-Rate is a program that works. Any changes to the E-Rate program should be focused on expanding a successful program that has yet to reach its full potential and ensuring the FCC remains a good steward of the changes adopted 2014, allowing those changes to progress and play out as intended.

E-Rate played a critical role is the rapid and significant expansion of connectivity in schools, and the 2014 modernization was a much needed update to ensure more schools and libraries are connected to broadband. The E-Rate’s investment in Category 2 Wi-Fi and internal connections funding is extremely valuable and could not be replaced by school, district or state funds.

Without Category 2 funding, recent upgrades to our infrastructure over the last 2 years would have been very difficult to achieve, it at all. During this time, wireless density was increased by 35%, wireless access controllers were replaced, along with firewalls, and all network switches district-wide. With some 40% of our budget left, plans include upgrading fiber connections between network closets and building locations. It is these types of upgrades that keep our school infrastructure current and give us the ability to provide reliable connectivity to assist students in staying current in using technology as a tool in the modern classroom.

In closing, I reiterate my district’s continued, strong support for and reliance upon the E-Rate program for being able to access and afford the high-speed connectivity that is so central to our students’ learning. Thank you for considering these comments.

Sincerely,

Paul Westbrook

Director of Technology Services

Mehlville School District

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