

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

October 20, 2017

Dear Chairman Pai,

I am writing today in response to the Federal Communications Commission’s (FCC) Public Notice which, among other things, is considering to modernize the E-rate program for schools and libraries. We are thankful for the FCC and for their continued support for the E-Rate program. The E-Rate program provides critical discounts to assist school districts to obtain affordable telecommunications, internet access, and the infrastructure to utilize that access.

Calhoun County Schools is a rural school district in Alabama with an enrollment of approximately 8600 students. Currently about half of our students are receiving free or reduced meal benefits and a large percentage of our population does not have home internet access. With the help of the E-rate program, the school district is able to ensure that each of its 17 schools is able to provide internet access to its students. This access is crucial in helping the students navigate through their primary and secondary education.

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. With the rapid evolution of technology, it is hard for schools to keep pace with some changes. Most times it is also hard to afford those changes.

The assistance that E-Rate has provided with Category 2 funding has helped Calhoun County Schools to provide and manage wireless internet access to each of our schools’ classrooms. Also we were able to upgrade our school routers and network switches to ensure a more efficient and secure network. This year we used our remaining Category 2 budget to begin upgrading our schools’ internal network cabling to a more current standard. This upgrade will allow us to further expand our network capabilities in order to support more devices for our students for state-required online testing, education software usage, and preparing our students for post-secondary education.

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,

Jenel Travis

Technology Director

Calhoun County Schools