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Friday June 6, 2014

Marlene H. Dortch
Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Re: WC Docket No. 13-184, Notice of *Ex Parte*

Dear Ms. Dortch:

The Benton Foundation[1] respectfully submits the following letter into the above captioned docket.

The Federal Communications Commission ("Commission") has a unique opportunity to advance and enhance the E-Rate program, which has, for decades, provided schools and libraries with critical support needed to bring students and library patrons access to the Internet. It is clear from a majority of the comments filed in the E-rate docket that high capacity broadband is critical and necessary infrastructure for our nations' schools and libraries. The Benton Foundation encourages the Commission to consider the following elements for the upcoming order on E-Rate modernization and reform:

1. **Make smarter use of E-rate funds by**:
   a. Encouraging consortium applications by prioritizing these applications and creating incentivizing mechanisms to spur collaboration between community anchors, especially between libraries and schools. The collaboration of applicants will help aggregate their purchasing power and lead to lower costs. The Commission should consider eliminating or reducing the matching requirement to incentivize consortium applications.
   b. Creating longer support periods to provide funding certainty.
   c. Supporting long term planning by applicants. To get the most out of every E-rate dollar, the Commission should provide planning, purchasing and implementation

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d. Supporting long term planning by applicants. To get the most out of every E-rate dollar, the Commission should provide planning, purchasing and implementation assistance to anchor institutions. This initial investment in planning will pay off in lower costs, smarter purchases, and, ultimately, the most comprehensive use of the resulting infrastructure.
e. Modernizing and reforming Priority I services to focus on broadband. The Commission should carefully craft a "step-down" program to prepare anchors for the elimination of legacy services.
f. Modernizing and reforming Priority II services to provide smarter support for internal connections.
g. Creating minimum bandwidth speed goals to school districts and library systems, from these hubs to individual schools and libraries and within classrooms and libraries using Wi-Fi connectivity for all learning spaces. The Commission should review and update these goals every four years.

2. **Revise rules around data collection to provide greater transparency with respect to pricing and speed information**. The Commission should create a public viewing platform to ensure that data is easy to understand and utilize, allowing a) the public to gauge progress towards speed goals and b) applicants to better understand pricing information. The Commission should support an open data policy so that the public may access all data collected.
3. **Create innovative strategies to focus support on those anchor institutions that have been left behind**. The Commission should focus capital investment on deploying high capacity broadband to schools and libraries in areas where it is not currently available. By focusing investment on robust infrastructure, the Commission can close these gaps and provides underserved communities with a strong foundation to meet their current and future needs.

4. **Provide schools and libraries with flexibility and choice with respect to the most cost-effective infrastructure investment**. The Commission should equalize the treatment of dark fiber and lit fiber services by allowing dark fiber electronics and construction costs to be eligible for E-Rate support.
5. **Adopt rules that give schools and libraries the option of purchasing broadband connectivity, network equipment and service contracts from federal, state agencies and other regional and local consortia**. The Commission should allow and encourage shared use of network infrastructure at all geographic levels among schools, libraries and other anchor institutions to reduce costs and eliminate silos, while ensuring that E-rate only funds school and library usage.

6. **Set aside funds for a comprehensive report studying alternative infrastructure deployment models for anchor institutions**. This includes several municipalities and Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) projects, which have utilized innovative strategies to deploy high capacity fiber infrastructure, while driving down reoccurring and long-term costs.

E-Rate connected nearly every school and library to the Internet and helped to usher education into the Internet age. Today, high capacity broadband Internet access is a basic necessity for students to prepare for careers in the Internet economy. High capacity Internet also drives down the costs of adult and continuing education, facilitates job training, and provides access to remote or distance learning and a myriad of other educational tools. If the promise of digital inclusion is to benefit any student, young or old, those that are left without access to high capacity broadband are shut out from the major educational tools of today and tomorrow. We have a choice today to fill in the gaps and reset the E-Rate program, so that we can ensure our nation's educational infrastructure is built to last and robust enough to meet the needs of all of America's students.

The Commission has an opportunity to build a smarter E-Rate program that will not only meet the educational needs of students and communities of today but also for decades to come. By providing ubiquitous high-speed broadband to our schools and libraries, the Commission can help ensure that no matter who you are, in which zip code you were born, the color of your skin, or the income of your parents, every child can take advantage of high speed learning, and every child has a chance to succeed. The Benton Foundation respectfully requests that the Commission issue an Order in this proceeding consistent with the recommendations set forth herein.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/

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Friday June 6, 2014

Cc: Lisa Hone, Chairman Wheeler, Commissioners Mignon Clyburn, Jessica Rosensworcel, Ajit Pai, Michael O'Rielly