

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

April 17, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker  
U.S. House of Representatives  
H-232, The Capitol Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives  
H-204, The Capitol Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Minority Leader McCarthy:

As Congress considers future COVID-19 relief legislation we urge you to support Washington state students by including funding to address the digital divide.

Washington state has been under a stay at home order since March 25 and schools will be closed through the end of the academic year. As school districts transition to online learning, superintendents have struggled to provide equitable education to all students. One of the barriers some students face is lack of access to the internet, commonly referred to as the “digital divide.”

The digital divide is not a new concern, but the COVID-19 pandemic has made evident the urgency of ensuring all students have internet access. Washington state is geographically diverse, but the digital divide exists in both urban and rural communities. In Arlington, approximately 10 percent of students lack broadband access at home; in Jefferson County less than 41 percent of individuals have access to broadband. For some families, internet access is too expensive. For others, reliable internet may simply not be available in their communities. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, students were often able to seek out public places, such as libraries and coffee shops, to access the internet. However, with businesses and public buildings closed to prevent the spread of COVID-19, these options are no longer available.

The *CARES Act* includes \$13.5 billion for an Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund, which local education agencies (LEAs) can use for a variety of purposes, including providing technology for online learning. We urge you to include additional funding in subsequent COVID-19 relief legislation to address the digital divide in both the short term and long term. Congress should provide funding for LEAs to connect students to the internet during the pandemic and increase funding for existing federal programs aimed at expanding broadband coverage, particularly in rural communities.

Thank you for your attention to this issue. We appreciate your consideration of this request and look forward to working with you on closing the digital divide for students in Washington state.

Sincerely,



Rep. Rick Larsen  
Member of Congress



Rep. Suzan DelBene  
Member of Congress



Rep. Derek Kilmer  
Member of Congress



Rep. Pramila Jayapal  
Member of Congress



Rep. Adam Smith  
Member of Congress



Rep. Kim Schrier, M.D.  
Member of Congress



Rep. Denny Heck  
Member of Congress



Rep. Jaime Herrera Beutler  
Member of Congress