

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 26, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
House of Representatives
1326 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Supporting Schools in Relief Package—Distance Learning and the Digital Divide

Dear Speaker Pelosi,

I/we write to provide my/our strong support for provisions related to delivering remote and distance learning in the upcoming stimulus package. Schools throughout the country, especially those in socio-economically disadvantaged school districts, critically need federal support to ensure continuity of education during the COVID-19 national emergency.

The COVID-19 national emergency has hit the education system especially hard. Currently, 46 states have closed their schools for some period, with a few states already closing for the remainder of the academic year. In total, over 120,000 public and private school buildings are currently closed, which affects over 50 million students. This will mean remote learning practices will be at the center of educational infrastructure during this period of emergency.

In speaking with the superintendents of two rural counties in my/our district(s), Polk and Osceola, the largest challenge they were facing related to distance learning was the internet access itself. This is why I/we urge the support for funding of items like mobile hotspots and increased number of devices that enable remote learning in the relief package. Accordingly, I/we support proposals that have been made to establish an emergency Connectivity Fund that will provide \$2 billion to schools and libraries for Wi-Fi hotspots, connected devices and mobile broadband internet service. I/we also support placing this fund within the existing Universal Service Fund and having it administered through the E-Rate program, as the E-Rate administrator has experience disseminating funds to schools and libraries. We urge that the needs of those in socio-economically disadvantaged communities be especially considered during this national emergency so that effects of the digital divide are not magnified.

Thank you for your time and attention in this matter during these hectic times.

Sincerely,



Darren Soto
Member of Congress



Greg Steube
Member of Congress