

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 13, 2020

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Trump:

As the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) begins advising schools to plan for possible interruptions, and as many schools shift toward a virtual classroom, we urge you to take action to protect the educational opportunities for the 12 million American students who live in homes without a broadband connection.

As schools and school districts are beginning to shift instruction online in an effort to protect their students from the spread of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak, there are approximately 12 million students across the country that fall into “the homework gap,” meaning they do not have access to the technology they need to participate in an online learning environment.¹ In 15 states across the country, the majority of students in rural areas do not have access to broadband.² And, the lack of access to broadband is particularly concerning for low-income students and students of color as these groups are less likely to have access to broadband than their counterparts³.

Now that you have issued an Emergency Declaration pursuant to the Stafford Act for states preparing for and responding to the COVID-19 outbreak, we urge you to set aside at least \$1 billion of the \$42.6 billion available in the Disaster Relief Fund (DRF) for schools and libraries to purchase mobile hotspots, and for the Federal Communications Commission to use its universal service powers, so that all students can continue to learn while we work together to respond to the spread of COVID-19. Given the current circumstances, students without access to broadband risk being left behind, a scenario that could cause irreparable harm to the long-term education of 12 million American children.

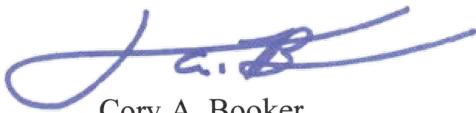
¹ <https://www.usnews.com/news/education-news/articles/2020-03-10/coronavirus-school-closings-expose-digital-divide>

² <https://www.jec.senate.gov/public/cache/files/ff7b3d0b-bc00-4498-9f9d-3e56ef95088f/the-digital-divide-.pdf>

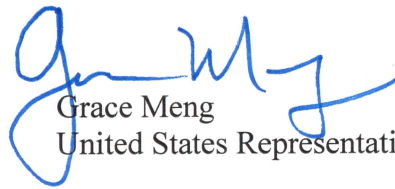
³ *Ibid*

Several local school districts across the country have already taken action and provided mobile hotspots to students without broadband access, but not all students live in communities that have the resources to provide for those students. Federal assistance is needed to ensure that the challenges faced by our most vulnerable students are not exacerbated by this crisis. It is critical that your response to the COVID-19 outbreak consider the needs of these students, and we strongly urge you to provide the necessary resources to allow them to continue learning.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'C.A. Booker', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Grace Meng', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Grace Meng
United States Representative

CC:

The Honorable Betsy DeVos, Secretary of Education

The Honorable Ajit Pai, Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission