

July 30, 2020

The Honorable Roger Wicker
Chairman
Senate Committee on Commerce, Science,
and Transportation
512 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Wicker:

The undersigned residents of Mississippi ask for your support to ensure our students have high-speed home internet access and devices so they can continue learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Many things are uncertain about the 2020–2021 school year. One thing, however, is quite clear: online learning is going to be one of the ways students receive instruction when schools reopen. Unfortunately, many students do not have the technology at home that is needed to participate in online learning. This “homework gap” could set back a generation of Mississippi’s students.

Mississippi ranks last in the nation regarding the percentage of households without high-speed home internet access. Four in ten families across our state do not have high-speed home internet access, including nearly 300,000 children. In addition to high-speed home internet, each student needs a connected device—a desktop, laptop, or tablet—to participate in online learning. Unfortunately, 17 percent of households in our state do not have one of these devices, including nearly 120,000 children.

Communities of color, low-income families, and families in rural areas are hit hardest by the digital divide. More than 60 percent of households in our state with an annual income below \$25,000 do not have high-speed home internet. In addition, nearly half of households in rural Mississippi do not have high-speed home internet. Moreover, one in four Black and Latino households each do not have a desktop, laptop, or tablet computer.

COVID-19 did not create the homework gap; however, it increases the urgency to equip our students with the technology needed to participate in online learning. Thankfully, the homework gap is a solvable problem. An estimated \$6.8 billion is needed to make high-speed home internet and devices available to students in Mississippi and across the country during the 2020–2021 school year. We ask you to ensure these funds are included through the E-rate program in the next COVID-19 legislation passed by Congress.

Sincerely,

[The Sign On Supporter in Mississippi]