

Sept. 11, 2020

### Senators Urge ISPs to Help Enable Remote Learning

Ten Senate Democrats and independent Sen. Angus King (Me.), who caucuses with the Democrats, have asked seven large Internet service providers (ISPs) — AT&T, Inc., CenturyLink, Inc., Charter Communications, Inc., Comcast Corp., Cox Communications, Inc., T-Mobile US, Inc., and Verizon Communications, Inc. — to help keep students connected as many return to remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic this fall.

Specifically, they asked for a suspension of data caps and data throttling policies and free or discounted broadband service for unconnected households with students learning remotely because of COVID-19–related school closures.

In a letter led by Sen. Mark Warner (D., Va.), the lawmakers told the chief executive officers of the companies, “In March, we were thankful that your company answered our request to make a range of accommodations and service changes to help Americans shifting to unprecedented levels of online education and telework, including suspending some broadband data limits on a temporary basis. Your decisive and timely actions helped cushion the impacts to families across the nation during the spring months.

“As a new school year commences, the need to accommodate an unprecedented reliance on data services to provide education continues. We have heard from public schools who express appreciation for internet service options that enable remote learning, but are also concerned with ongoing data limitations and continued lack of service for many households. In many situations, online learning activities require additional data allowances beyond plans readily available for students. We kindly request that you again take immediate action to help students connect to the online resources they need to learn, including expanding coverage areas and rolling out new service plans that better meet the needs of these families. Unprecedented numbers of students now rely on remote access for education due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and remote education is only as effective as available internet service,” they continued.

They added, “Our offices have fielded numerous complaints from parents and educators frustrated by usage caps and limited bandwidth, which prevent daily video calls needed to learn and work from home. And those who have no other option find themselves buried in overage fees. In some cases, we’ve learned that eligibility for new services announced for low-income households is barred if that household has missed monthly payments in the past. These predicaments shine a light on our growing digital divide and threaten the education and subsequent futures of our students.”

The senators asked the ISPs to “temporarily suspend data caps and associated fees or throttling for affected communities, and work with public school districts, colleges, and universities to provide free, or

at-cost broadband options for students whose schools are closed due to COVID-19 and don't have sufficient access at home. These options are essential for students, regardless of household billing histories. Working with school administrations to facilitate qualification for discounts based on the schools' personal knowledge may be especially helpful. For example, students qualifying for free/discounted lunches may also prequalify for free/discounted broadband services as well."

Sen. Warner led a similar letter in March, and he made a similar request of tech manufacturers last month to provide discounted or free computers, laptops, and other devices for remote learners in Virginia (TR Daily, Aug. 24).

Joining Sens. Warner and King on the letters were Sens. Tim Kaine (D., Va.), Michael Bennet (D., Colo.), Cory Booker (D., N.J.), Mazie Hirono (D., Hawaii), Jeff Merkley (D., Ore.), Patty Murray (D., Wash.), Gary Peters (D., Mich.), Elizabeth Warren (D., Mass.), and Ron Wyden (D., Ore.). —Lynn Stanton, [lynn.stanton@wolterskluwer.com](mailto:lynn.stanton@wolterskluwer.com)).

*Copyright © 2020 CCH Incorporated, All Rights Reserved*