



September 11, 2020

Jeff McElfresh
Chief Executive Officer
AT&T Inc.
Whitacre Tower
208 S. Akard Street
Dallas, TX 75201

Thomas Rutledge
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer
Charter Communications, Inc.
400 Atlantic Street 10th floor
Stamford, CT 06901

Jeffrey Storey
President and Chief Executive Officer
CenturyLink, Inc.
1025 Eldorado Boulevard
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Dave Watson
President and Chief Executive Officer
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Pat Esser
President and Chief Executive Officer
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Mike Sievert
Chief Executive Officer
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Hans Vestberg
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer
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One Verizon Way
Basking Ridge, NJ 07920

Dear Messrs. McElfresh, Esser, Rutledge, Storey, Sievert, Watson, Vestberg:

As the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic requires returning students across the United States to rely on remote learning and online courses, we write to ask for your assistance to help ensure students can take full advantage of essential education opportunities this fall. 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.

Effective remote learning requires capable devices and adequate broadband internet access. The Pew Research Center found in March the “homework gap” of students lacking reliable access to a computer at home is a significant challenge for many students, and even more pronounced for Black, Hispanic and lower income households. With many schools closed and students now relying on the internet to connect with their teachers, instruction materials, and assignments, sufficient data allowances are even more essential for students’ success now and throughout their future. However, the coronavirus pandemic has forced many parents to work from home, increasing their monthly broadband usage.

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. In June, McKinsey and Co. reported that this education achievement gap limited the growth of the U.S. gross domestic product (GDP) by at least \$426 billion between 2009 and 2019. The necessary closing of schools during the public health crisis and transition to remote education has exacerbated these gaps.

For these crucial reasons, we ask again that you 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.

We look forward to promptly hearing from you about what steps you will take to help limit the economic and social disruption that COVID-19 is posing at this challenging time. We recognize that many broadband providers have experienced significant business growth since the onset of this crisis.¹ We ask that you identify ways to give back to the communities you serve through

¹ Rizzo, Lillian and Click Sawyer. “Pandemic Changed Internet Usage.” *Wall Street Journal*, 17 August 2020, p. B1, B4.

deployment of expanded service and additional service plans and policies that respond to the concerns we've heard from constituents about access, affordability, and data rates.

Containing the health impact of COVID-19 will depend on observance of social distancing measures outlined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other public health authorities. But containing the *economic and social* impact of COVID-19 requires a whole-of-society effort. At this time of great strain on our economic and education systems, we encourage you to do everything you can to cushion the impacts on American families and students. Our offices would be happy to connect you with local education officials and administrators to facilitate this effort.

We appreciate your time and consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

/s/ Mark R. Warner

MARK R. WARNER
United States Senate

/s/ Mazie K. Hirono

MAZIE K. HIRONO
United States Senate

/s/ Jeffrey A. Merkley

JEFFREY A. MERKLEY
United States Senate

/s/ Angus S. King Jr.

ANGUS S. KING Jr.
United States Senate

/s/ Ron Wyden

RON WYDEN
United States Senate

/s/ Michael F. Bennet

MICHAEL F. BENNET
United States Senate

/s/ Tim Kaine

TIM KAINE
United States Senate

/s/ Patty Murray

PATTY MURRAY
United States Senate

/s/ Cory A. Booker

CORY A. BOOKER
United States Senate

/s/ Elizabeth Warren

ELIZABETH WARREN
United States Senate

/s/ Gary C. Peters

GARY C. PETERS
United States Senate