



**Committee on Catholic Education
Committee on Communications**

3211 Fourth Street, NE • Washington DC 20017 • 202-541-3132•202-541-3390

November 18, 2014

The Honorable Tom Wheeler
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20554

Dear Chairman Wheeler:

We write you today on behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Committee on Catholic Education and the Committee on Communications to express our appreciation and support for your proposal to permanently increase the funding level of the E-Rate program.

The E-rate program is a vital resource to the Catholic schools in the United States and an important means for ensuring all children have access to the internet. Last year, Catholic schools educated 1,974,578 students in 6,594 Catholic schools, 3,200 of which participated in the E-Rate program. Your continued leadership on this issue reflects your commitment to the cornerstones of the E-Rate program including access to 21st century education and learning, supporting the program's growth and transition from connectivity to capacity, and equity. All three of these—access, growth, and equity within the E-Rate program—are unsustainable without increased funding to support the program's current and future goals.

During the last 18 years, the E-Rate program has been tremendously successful in helping schools obtain needed telecommunications services and get connected to the internet. The program has also been a critical source of technology funds which are a vital resource for enhancing student learning in our Catholic schools. Despite the glowing success of the program, E-Rate has been consistently and severely underfunded. Requests for E-rate funding have exceeded the amount of available funds annually, with demand steadily increasing. Your proposal to fund the E-Rate program at \$3.9 billion annually will allow public and private schools who have been unable to participate in the program due to lack of funds, to provide 21st century education and learning with the additional funding connecting students and their teachers to high-speed broadband.

Most importantly, what is particularly hopeful about your proposal is not the additional funding itself, but the difference it will make in the lives of our Catholic school students. It will allow our Catholic schools to move from basic connectivity to meeting capacity needs, not only to expand access to connectivity, but to ensure access to adequate, sustainable capacity. It will mean that more of our schools can provide the bandwidth necessary to support 1:1 digital learning. It means that internal connections are possible so that the system will not crash when an entire class tries to access an educational task on their computers. It will improve Catholic student outcomes by allowing our teachers to take full advantage of the online and digital resources and tools needed to transform teaching and learning. Finally, the additional funding will ensure adequate access to connectivity, including a focus

on our schools in disadvantaged communities so that everyone, everywhere – rural, urban and suburban – has access to sufficient capacity. Catholic schools have a rich tradition of educating the disadvantaged and the underserved children in this country and doing it well.

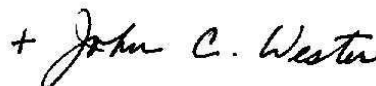
As the Second Vatican Council declared half a century ago, “Society at all levels, requires information if it is to choose the right course. The community requires well-informed citizens. The right to information is not merely the prerogative of the individual, it is essential to the public interest.” (*Communio Et Progressio* 35). The E-rate program provides a powerful tool in bridging the digital divide and ensuring that all children have access to the information necessary to be productive and responsible citizens of society.

We applaud your leadership and urge your fellow Commissioners to ensure the E-rate program can provide sustainable broadband capacity to our nation’s Catholic school students and teachers by adopting the proposal to permanently increase funding to support current and future goals of the E-rate program.

With prayerful best wishes,

Handwritten signature of George J. Lucas in cursive, preceded by a plus sign.

Most Reverend George J. Lucas
Archbishop of Omaha
Chairman, Committee on Catholic Education

Handwritten signature of John C. Wester in cursive, preceded by a plus sign.

Most Reverend John Wester
Bishop of Salt Lake City
Chairman, Committee on Communications

Cc: The Honorable Mignon Clyburn
The Honorable Jessica Rosenworcel
The Honorable Ajit Pai
The Honorable Michael O’Rielly