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OF THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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TO THE MEMBERS OF THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS:

Yesterday, Labor Day, marked the unofficial end of summer, and by now nearly all students across the U.S. have returned to school either in person or virtually. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce urgently calls on Congress to provide the funding necessary to ensure students without sufficient access to digital tools do not fall behind. In addition, Congress should fully fund the “Broadband DATA Act” (P.L. 116-130) signed into law in March, which would allow the FCC to better facilitate long-term digital resilience.

Although America’s broadband providers have led the world in managing capacity changes during the pandemic, at least 18 million Americans lack access to broadband, with lower-income students and students of color being disproportionately affected. For example, nearly 18 percent of Latino and 11 percent of Black American households lack computer access. With the majority of students returning to school online, it is fundamentally unfair to allow students who lack the digital tools to connect to fall through the cracks of the Digital Divide and in danger of being left further behind. Connectivity is an imperative of the Chamber’s [Equality of Opportunity initiative](#).

To urgently address this pressing issue, Congress should appropriate timely and temporary funding in a technologically-neutral manner outside the existing E-Rate and other Universal Service Fund programs to provide: 1) wired or wireless connectivity; 2) service equipment such as modems, routers, and hotspots; and 3) devices like tablets, computers, and smartphones.

To prepare America for the next national challenge, Congress must adopt a robust strategy to ensure all Americans are connected. Before such a bold strategy can be implemented, it is crucial that the FCC be fully funded to carry out its mandate under the Broadband DATA Act to determine which Americans truly lack access to high-speed internet.

We urge you not to let the virtual bell ring and time run out for America’s students this semester and to provide the necessary assistance to families without digital access.

Sincerely,



Neil L. Bradley