

# Connected Futures: The E-Rate Policy Summit



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**SHLB**  
SCHOOLS, HEALTH & LIBRARIES  
BROADBAND COALITION



**ErateSync**  
Know Everything About Your E-Rate



# Today's Agenda

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- **10:00** – Welcome & Introductions
- **10:15** – E-Rate Program Refresher (Beverly Sutherland, ErateSync, SHLB Board Secretary)
- **10:30** – E-Rate Visibility (Trisha Dominguez, SISD & Elijah Goins, ErateSync)
- **12:30** – SHLB Updates (Kristen Corra, SHLB Coalition)
- **1:45** – Open Floor, Live Q&A, and Closing

**APRIL 28, 2026 EL PASO, TX · REGION 19 ESC**

***Track. Prove. Deliver.***





# Your Top Priorities

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- **93%** – Future Direction of E-Rate Modernization
- **79%** – Expansion of Cybersecurity Support
- **64%** – Compliance, Fraud Risk, and Legal Liability
- **57%** – Administrative Complexity & Application Burden
- **57%** – Universal Service Fund Legal Challenges

**14 RESPONSES · 8 IN CYBER PILOT · 4 SPEAKERS**

*Your priorities shape today's refresher*





# Who Is SHLB?

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- **Who** – National Public Interest Organization made up of 330+ members from various sectors of the broadband landscape
- **Where** – Based in Washington, D.C., but members represent all corners of the U.S.
- **What** – We advocate mostly at the federal level for policies and programs that enable anchor institutions to obtain and promote open, secure, high-quality broadband services to support connectivity and opportunity for all

**LEARN MORE ABOUT SHLB HERE**

**<https://www.shlb.org/membership>**



# SHLB Updates

## Speaker



**Kristen Corra**

Policy Counsel  
SHLB Coalition

- FCC E-Rate Updates
  - School bus wi-fi and hotspot programs
  - Cybersecurity
  - Competitive Bidding Portal & USAC Comments
- Congressional Updates
  - USF Working Group
  - Screen time in schools
- Legislative Updates
  - 5th Circuit USF litigation
- How can you get involved?

# FCC Updates: Past Programs

## School Bus Wi-Fi

**Adopted & ESL:** 2023

**Funded by:** E-Rate (Cat. 1)

**Characteristics:**

- Network equipment & services
- Certain exclusions
- CIPA applies

**Rolled Back:** 2025

- FCC took action

**Program had a year under its belt; USAC directed to fund approvals**

## Hotspot Lending

**Adopted:** 2024 (to begin FY25)

**Funded by:** E-Rate

**Characteristics:**

- Specific budget mechanism
- Various program rules/safeguards

**~8,000 schools/libraries applied**

**Rolled Back:** 2025

- Senate vote; but stalled in the House
- FCC took action

**Pending requests not approved by USAC**

# FCC Updates: Current Programs

## Cybersecurity Pilot Program

**Adopted:** June 2024

**Funding Mechanism:** USF -Outside of E-Rate

**Total Budget:** \$200 million

**Timeframe:** 3 years

**484 Applications:** 2,734 (~93% schools, 4% libraries, 3% consortia)

**Total Funding Requests:** \$3.7 billion

**Eligible Schools/Libraries/Consortia:** 707

**Who Applied?** All 50 states, Puerto Rico, D.C.

### WHAT'S ELIGIBLE?

- Advanced/next-generation firewalls
- Endpoint protection
- Identity protection and authentication
- Monitoring, detection, and response

### WHAT'S INELIGIBLE?

- Services/equipment/costs eligible under E-Rate
- Anything which has, or will be, reimbursed through other USF or federal, state, local program
- End-user devices (like tablets, laptops)
- Staff salaries and labor costs
- Beneficiary and consulting services not related to installation and configuration
- Equipment on FCC's Covered List



# FCC Updates: Current Programs

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## Future Cybersecurity Funding?

**GOAL OF THE CYBER PILOT: Assess needs for a future (permanent?) funding structure.**

### So, What's Next?

- What data will the FCC have to assess? When? Will it be public?
- Allow applicants to use existing Cat. 2 budget for advanced firewalls?
- Create a new Cat. 3? What would that look like?

### Who's Talking About This?

- Congressional offices - Matsui
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# FCC Updates: Future Programs/Actions



## USAC Reform

**Public Notice:** Comments Due May 15

### Questions About USAC Reform:

- *Operations and administration reform*
  - How can the FCC create efficiencies in administration?
  - Which areas or processes are most in need of streamlining today?
- *Operations and internal management*
  - Are there USAC processes that cause undue delay or burden?
  - Could changes in oversight and guidance increase responsiveness?

# FCC Updates: Future Programs/Actions



## E-Rate Competitive Bidding Portal

**Commission Vote:** April 30 at 10:30 am

**Report and Order:** Addresses 2 Items

- *2021: Competitive Bidding Portal*
  - Overhaul of competitive bidding process
  - Communications, access, documentation
- *2023: Streamlining E-Rate administration*
  - Transition of services
  - Mid-Year bandwidth changes
  - Invoicing waiver (15 day grace period)

# FCC Updates: Future Programs/Actions

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## E-Rate Competitive Bidding Portal

### Beginning with funding year 2028

- Anticipated to be available to applicants beginning July 1, 2027

### Service providers

- Required to submit their bids in response to applicants' FCC Forms 470 into a USAC-managed competitive bidding portal

### Applicants

- Required to use the bidding portal for communications and updates during the competitive bidding process and then must upload bid evaluation and vendor selection documentation with their FCC Form 471 applications to upload contracts and award documentation

# FCC Updates: Future Programs/Actions

## E-Rate Competitive Bidding Portal

**SHLB ORGANIZED A LETTER  
WITH OVER 80 SIGN ON'S**

### SHLB's Recent Advocacy

- Opposes the bidding portal

### If FCC decides to move forward, we suggest . . .

- Simpler document repository
  - IG's recommendation
- Stakeholder feedback
- Delayed effective date
- Waive denials/compliance issues for first year

April 23, 2026

SUBMITTED ELECTRONICALLY VIA ECF5

Ms. Marlene H. Dortch  
Secretary  
Federal Communications Commission  
45 L Street NE  
Washington, DC 20554

Re: Ex Parte Filing:  
Promoting Fair and Open Competitive Bidding in the E-Rate Program, WC Docket No. 21-455  
Schools and Libraries Universal Service Support Mechanism, CC Docket No. 02-6

Dear Madam Secretary:

The undersigned organizations write to address the Commission's draft *Report and Order on Reconsideration* (Draft Order) that would amend E-Rate program rules to 1) create and implement a competitive bidding portal (Bidding Portal), and 2) simplify and streamline program procedures for applicants and service providers.<sup>1</sup>

We are concerned that the establishment of a Bidding Portal and its associated complex requirements and procedures as proposed in the Draft Order is not only unnecessary, but undermines the good work being done to streamline the E-Rate program. We respectfully request that the Commission not proceed with its proposed implementation of the Bidding Portal. If the Commission elects to proceed with the Bidding Portal, we urge it to delay implementation until at least Funding Year 2029; hold a public comment proceeding to allow input into the portal's development; create beta testing with applicants and providers to ensure the portal functions appropriately; and hold training for all applicants and vendors on the portal and new requirements under this order.

At the outset, we emphasize that the E-Rate program is the largest federal educational technology program in the country, making it possible for public and private schools and public libraries to acquire affordable broadband services. In return, this connectivity helps students and

<sup>1</sup> Promoting Fair and Open Competitive Bidding in the E-Rate Program, WC Docket No. 21-455 Schools and Libraries Universal Service Support Mechanism, CC Docket No. 02-6, Report and Order on Reconsideration, Draft on Circulation, FCC-CIRC2604-05 (Apr. 9, 2026), (Draft Order).



# Congressional Updates

## USF Working Group

**Originated:** 2023

**Reassembled:** 2025

### Multiple Questions regarding the USF

- Contribution reform
- Distribution reform
  - All four USF programs
- USAC reform

JUNE 12, 2025

### Luján, Fischer Announce Bipartisan, Bicameral Universal Service Fund Working Group

Washington, D.C. – Today, U.S. Senators Ben Ray Luján (D-NM), Ranking Member of the Senate Telecommunications and Media Subcommittee, and Deb Fischer (R-NE), Chair of the Senate Telecommunications and Media Subcommittee, announced the reconstitution of the Universal Service Fund (USF) Working Group. Last Congress, Senator Luján [launched](#) the original bipartisan, bicameral working group to evaluate and propose potential reforms to the USF.

In the House, Communications and Technology Subcommittee Chair Richard Hudson (R-NC9) and Ranking Member Doris Matsui (D-CA7) are spearheading the effort. Senators Moran (R-KS), Klobuchar (D-MN), Capito (R-WV), Peters (D-MI), Sullivan (R-AK), and Rosen (D-NV) have joined as members.

"The Universal Service Fund has been a lifeline for rural, Tribal, and underserved communities in New Mexico and across the country – connecting schools, hospitals, and families to affordable, reliable internet. For nearly 30 years, the Universal Service Fund has been instrumental in expanding broadband access across the country. I'm glad to once again join bipartisan, bicameral leaders to modernize and strengthen the USF and ensure it remains well-equipped to connect Americans no matter where they live. I'll keep fighting to protect this vital program for the communities that depend on it," Luján said.



# Congressional Updates

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## USF Working Group: Program(s) Modernization

### SHLB's Focus: Modernization for both E-Rate and Rural Health Care Programs

- Cybersecurity funding - now and in the future
- Hotspots and bus Wi-Fi
- Program streamlining
- Recovery (statute of limitations)

### USAC Reform

- Transparency
  - Stakeholder feedback
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# Congressional Updates

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## Screen Time/Use in Schools

### Past Bills

- Kids On Social Media & Eyes on the Board Act

### Congressional Movement

- Dec. 2025: NTIA listening session
- Jan. 2026: Senate Screen Time hearing
  - Examined various issues around excessive use of screen time, including impacts of social media

### Recent SHLB Advocacy

- SHLB and other education groups sent a letter to the Senate Commerce Committee to weigh in on the value of technology in schools and federal support for connectivity

### Future Endeavors

- FCC rulemaking?
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# Legislative Updates

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## Last Year

### *FCC v. Consumers' Research: Is the USF's Contribution Mechanism Constitutional?*

#### Background

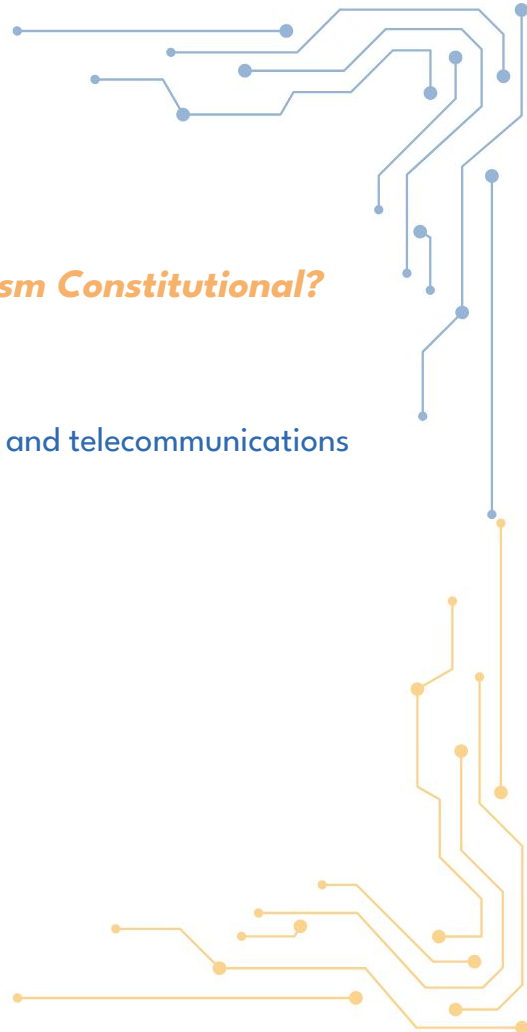
- The USF collects contributions from telecom companies to support broadband and telecommunications access. This money funds programs like E-Rate.

#### The Legal Challenge

- Consumers' Research claimed that the USF is unconstitutional
  - Public non-delegation – Did Congress provide guidance to the FCC?
  - Private non-delegation – Does the FCC oversee USAC?
- SHLB was a named party, advocating for USF constitutionality

#### The Outcome – USF Remains In Place!

- Supreme Court 6-3 decision – The USF is constitutional
  - Congress provided FCC with an “intelligible principle”
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# Legislative Updates

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**This Year**

## *Consumers' Research Challenging Legal Basis for E-Rate & Rural Health Care*

### **What Happened?**

- Consumers' Research back at the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals
- Footnote and dissenting remarks in Supreme Court decision

### **The Legal Challenge**

- Similar non-delegation arguments as previous case
  - Zeroing in on two specific provisions of the Communications Act: Sections 254(c)(3) and 254(h)(2)
- SHLB still a named party, advocating for USF constitutionality

### **What's At Stake?**

- Undermining the legal basis for the E-Rate and to Rural Health Care Programs

### **Timing**

- All briefs are in; pending oral argument
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# How Can You Get Involved?

## *What Can You Do to Advocate for Policies/Programs?*

- **Gather data/stories in a formal way**
  - You do so many things; make sure you are keeping track of what you do!
- **Know what you need and how to ask for it**
  - When it comes to funding for programs/resources, do you know your elevator pitch?
- **Stay informed**
  - Organizations like SHLB often provide membership opportunities, conferences, and free resources like webinars, newsletters
- **Participate however you can/are allowed**
  - Sign-on letters
  - Fly-Ins and FCC/Hill meetings

# Advocacy In Action: SHLB's 2026 Fly-In

**On Wednesday, March 11** SHLB members gathered in Washington DC to meet with their Congressional Offices and advocate for issues we care about.

- Over **40 SHLB members** attended and held nearly **90 meetings** with Members of Congress.

**Our main message? Protect the Universal Service Fund!**

- Congress is currently working on USF reform, and there is litigation threatening the USF (and in particular) the constitutionality of the E-rate program.
- We advocated for a sustainable, predictable funding mechanism that can be modernized to meet today's school and library needs

**More USF  
materials here:**

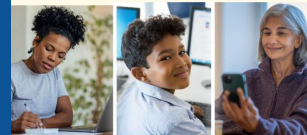
<https://www.shlb.org/protect-usf>

APRIL 2025

## PROTECT USF

*Case studies highlighting outcome-based impacts of E-Rate and Rural Health Care funding in communities*

The Universal Service Fund (USF) is a lifeline for schools, libraries, and healthcare providers, ensuring they have access to affordable, high-speed broadband. This connectivity is essential for students, library patrons, telehealth patients, and even entire communities. However, this critical funding is under threat. To highlight its impact, SHLB has gathered real-world success stories that showcase how USF programs—including E-Rate and Rural Health Care—are transforming lives and bridging the digital divide.



# Fly-In Meetings

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**Ending the day with Senator Ed Markey, an original E-Rate advocate!**



# AnchorNets 2026

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**When:** October 7-9, 2026

**Where:** Crystal City, Arlington,  
VA 22202

**Register at:**

[www.shlb.org/anchornets-2026](http://www.shlb.org/anchornets-2026)

**Why:** To be knowledgeable  
advocates for the issues we care  
about!

