April 10, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington D.C. 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader McCarthy, and Minority Leader Schumer,

As representatives of the leading health organizations who are fighting on the front lines to mitigate the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, we write to endorse H.R. 6474, the "Healthcare Broadband Expansion During COVID-19 Act," introduced by Representatives Anna Eshoo and Don Young. We respectfully request the inclusion of this legislation in the next COVID-19 relief package. This much-needed legislation would appropriate $2 billion for the Rural Health Care (RHC) program administered by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to allow healthcare providers across the country to upgrade their broadband connectivity and expand their telemedicine services to the public. We expect that healthcare providers' demand for broadband connectivity will skyrocket in the near future as they race to handle the surge of patients who need immediate medical attention.

This bill has been carefully crafted to be technology-neutral and provider-neutral. Under the bill, all public and non-profit health care providers would be eligible for funding, whether located in urban, suburban or rural markets. Healthcare providers in rural regions must be able to share Electronic Medical Records, engage in remote patient monitoring, and connect to research facilities and medical specialists in urban hospitals to ensure that telehealth services reach everyone. In short, no healthcare provider should be forced to curtail their telemedicine operations because of a lack of funding to pay for the underlying broadband connectivity.

The legislation also would direct the FCC to streamline its administration of the program's rules – such as by adopting a rolling application process, allowing healthcare providers to upgrade their broadband immediately from their existing provider, and ensuring that funds are quickly – to ensure the funding is made available right away. At the same time, the legislation ensures that the program will operate with fiscal integrity by making sure that healthcare providers contribute a small portion of the cost of the broadband equipment and services.

The Schools, Health & Libraries Broadband Coalition (SHLB Coalition) has calculated that about $2 billion in funding is necessary to ensure that all healthcare providers have sufficient financial support to expand their broadband capacity immediately in their response to the coronavirus pandemic. This funding will supplement, not replace, the $605 million that the FCC has already allocated to the RHC program in 2020.

We urge you to include this important legislation in the next COVID-19 relief package because it is critical for our nation's health care providers. For further information, please contact John Windhausen, SHLB Coalition, at (202) 256-9616 or jwindhausen@shlb.org.

Sincerely,

John Windhausen, Jr.

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cc: The Honorable Frank Pallone, Jr.
        The Honorable Greg Walden
        The Honorable Roger Wicker
        The Honorable Maria Cantwell
        The Honorable Michael Doyle
        The Honorable Robert Latta
        The Honorable John Thune
        The Honorable Brian Schatz