



WHO IS SHLB?

SHLB advocates for policies and programs that empower anchor institutions to access and promote open, secure, high-quality broadband services, fostering connectivity and opportunity for all.

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

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What is the USF?

The Universal Service Fund (USF) aims to ensure that all citizens, regardless of location, have access to affordable telecommunications and broadband services. Created in the 1996 Telecom Act, the USF helps to subsidize communications costs for schools, libraries, healthcare providers, low-income residents, and those in rural and high-cost areas. Four programs in total, the USF includes two programs relied on by anchor institutions across the country:

- **E-Rate:** Provides funding for internet access for eligible schools (including public, private, religious, nonprofit, and charter) as well as libraries. The amount of the subsidy is based on the poverty level of the student population and the urban or rural status of the institution's location.
- **Rural Health Care (RHC):** Allows rural health care providers to pay rates for telecommunications services similar to those of their urban counterparts.

Threats

In Court

SHLB won a landmark victory last summer at the Supreme Court! In *SHLB v. Consumers' Research*, the Court upheld the constitutionality of the USF, protecting the E-Rate and RHC programs. But ongoing legal threats remain: Consumers Research is back at the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals, challenging specific parts of the USF that were not technically decided in the Supreme Court case, which includes threats to E-Rate and RHC. SHLB is fighting back by intervening in this case. A decision is not expected until later in 2026, at the earliest.

In Congress

Funding for the USF should be **predictable and sustainable**. The USF should continue to be supported by a dedicated funding stream.

Our Ask

USF support must be preserved. Without subsidies for internet connectivity, our nation's schools, libraries, and healthcare facilities would face significant challenges, impairing their ability to serve students, library patrons, and the broader community. Millions of people rely on these institutions for education, information, health care, and essential services.

Congress and the FCC should strengthen and improve the current contribution system with a modernized approach that broadens the base of funding and provides lasting support for these essential programs.

Funding the USF through appropriations is risky for schools, libraries, and health care providers. SHLB rejects all calls to subject any parts of the USF to the appropriations process.

That's why we traveled to DC to ask Members of Congress to support the long-term future and health of the E-Rate and Rural Health Care programs!