

## **FACT SHEET: Supporting Wi-Fi Hotspots to Connect Students and Library Patrons**

### ***Latest Modernization to the E-Rate Program Will Support Connectivity for Educational Purposes as Congress Intended***

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*“It should be the standard practice that students or anyone who can’t afford internet at home can check out a Wi-Fi hotspot from their local library. This update is how we’ll help close the Homework Gap and support folks on the wrong side of the digital divide so they can fully participate in modern civic and commercial life.”*

*– FCC Chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel*

#### **Overview**

On July 18, the Federal Communications Commission will vote on new rules to make the off-premises use of Wi-Fi hotspots and mobile wireless internet services eligible for E-Rate funding. The new rules would take the next step towards modernizing the program to ensure students and library patrons have access to the connectivity needed for a 21st century quality education. This latest advancement would permit eligible schools and libraries to request E-Rate support for Wi-Fi hotspots and mobile wireless internet services that can be used off-premises so that students, school staff, or library patrons with the greatest need can be connected and learn without limits.

#### **What is E-Rate?**

Since 1997, the E-Rate program has provided discounts to assist schools and libraries in obtaining affordable telecommunications and internet access. Over the years, the program has been modernized to focus support on bringing high-speed broadband to and within schools and libraries.

#### **How It Helps Students and Consumers**

Today, millions of students, school staff, and library patrons around the country are on the wrong side of the digital and educational divide and, as a result, lack access to the same educational resources as their peers. With the end of the Affordable Connectivity Program, the country’s largest broadband affordability program which helped connect 23 million households to high-speed internet at home, many impacted households may now need to turn to their local schools or libraries to stay connected for their educational needs.

#### **Safeguards**

The new rules would:

- Ensure the supported Wi-Fi hotspots and services are used for educational purposes, are not funded through other sources, and are properly documented for auditing purposes and confirmation of compliance with the program rules.
- Protect students by requiring compliance with the Children’s Internet Protection Act, which requires schools and libraries use filters to ensure that children are protected from exposure to harmful material while accessing the internet provided by a school or library – including blocking or filtering visual depictions that are obscene or harmful to minors across all sites, monitoring the online activities of minors, and providing education about

appropriate online behavior, including warnings against cyberbullying. Some schools and libraries block or filter social media sites as a result.

- Adopt a budget mechanism that sets a limit on the amount of support that an applicant can request for Wi-Fi hotspots and services over a three-year period.

### **Legal Authority**

Section 254 of the Communications Act of 1934 grants the Commission broad and flexible authority to specify the services and equipment that are eligible for E-Rate support and to adjust the program to evolve with changing circumstances. Consistent with past precedent, the Commission can make off-premises use of Wi-Fi hotspots and services eligible for E-Rate support with this authority. For example, in 2003, the Commission permitted E-Rate funding for a school bus driver's use of wireless services while delivering children to and from school, library staff use of wireless services on a mobile library unit van, and the use by teachers or other school staff of wireless services while accompanying students on a field trip or sporting event.

### **Process**

The Commission proposed these new rules on November 1, 2023, and took public comment on the proposal. These final rules, called a Report and Order, will be voted on by the full Commission at its July 18 Open Meeting.

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*This is an unofficial announcement of Commission action. Release of the full text of a Commission order constitutes official action.  
See MCI v. FCC, 515 F.2d 385 (D.C. Cir. 1974).*