



INTERGOVERNMENTAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

TO THE

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

ADVISORY RECOMMENDATION NUMBER 2014 -2

In the Matter of: Modernizing the E-Rate Program for Schools and Libraries, Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (FNPRM), WC Docket No. 13-184.

The Intergovernmental Advisory Committee ("IAC") to the Federal Communications Commission ("Commission") submits this Advisory Recommendation in connection with WC Docket No. 13-184, at the request of FCC staff which asked for the IAC's recommendations in the E-rate proceeding at the IAC's last meeting on November 24, 2014, and has now asked that it be placed in the record of the E-rate proceeding. See 47 C.F.R. 1.1203(a)(1), 1.1204(a)(10), and 1.1206(b)(2)(v).

The IAC supports the Commission's efforts to modernize the E-Rate program to bring high-speed broadband to our nation's libraries and schools. The IAC supports Chairman Wheeler's proposal to increase the funding cap for the E-Rate program from the current \$2.4 billion to \$3.9 billion.¹ The IAC agrees with the conclusion of the FCC staff report that additional funding will be necessary to meet the goals of E-Rate modernization, especially in rural areas.² E-Rate funded technology has the potential for helping to equalize educational opportunity by providing more equitable access to instructional resources and helping all students become proficient in the information and media literacy skills that are increasingly necessary for opportunity and mobility in the 21st century economy. In addition to increasing the amount of E-Rate funding, we recommend that the Commission take the following steps to strengthen the program: (1) facilitate cost effective infrastructure investment by schools and libraries by allowing fairness and flexibility in funding fiber construction; (2) promote greater use of the program in tribal areas and underserved urban areas; (3) encourage consortia, especially between neighboring school districts and libraries; and (4) continually seek administrative efficiencies.

We believe that an increase in the E-Rate program spending cap is urgent and that the Commission cannot assume that the current level of funding is sufficient. As the FCC's staff report explains, it appears that 31% of urban public schools and 41% of rural public schools do not have access to fiber

¹ Fact Sheet: FCC Chairman Wheeler's Plan to Reboot the E-Rate Program to Meet the Needs of 21st Century Digital Learning. http://transition.fcc.gov/Daily_Releases/Daily_Business/2014/db1117/DOC-330508A1.pdf

² Wireline Competition Bureau and Office of Strategic Planning and Policy Analysis E-Rate Data Update WC Docket NO. 13-184, p. 8. http://transition.fcc.gov/Daily_Releases/Daily_Business/2014/db1117/DOC-330505A1.pdf

facilities necessary to meet the Commission's connectivity goals.³ Across the country, school districts are deploying online, adaptive student assessment and curriculum that require both more robust Wi-Fi networks within schools and higher capacity broadband fiber connections. While savings from eliminating legacy services and other measures should be pursued, these savings will not be sufficient to fund the growing need for E-Rate funding. We are concerned that without an increase to the spending cap, there will be insufficient funds to support the fiber and wireless build-out and achieve broadband connectivity goals over the next five years.

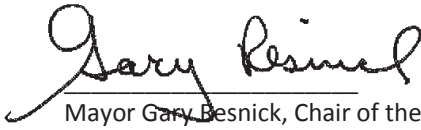
To achieve the broadband goals, the program should allow schools and libraries to meet these needs in the most cost effective way possible, looking at the total cost of ownership. One measure to achieve this would be to equalize the treatment of lit and dark fiber for E-Rate eligibility, much the same way as the Commission's current Rural Health Care pilot program. This could be achieved by allowing the electronics necessary to provide services over dark fiber to be eligible for e-rate funding. The Commission should allow a variety of approaches, including carrier provided, self-provisioning, municipal and research networks so that it can identify the most cost effective alternative. We encourage the Commission to look favorably on proposals that are scalable as the number of devices increase in schools/libraries, the complexity of the data increases, so that the system does not become limited or obsolete upon its installation. Finally, the program should allow for a variety of methods for funding fiber construction and fiber connectivity, longer contract periods and contracting with government-run fiber networks.

The IAC supports the measures that the FCC has taken to increase tribal participation in the e-rate program, including increased data collection on tribal participation, improved tribe-specific outreach, and the creation of a USAC Tribal Liaison. We further urge the FCC to recognize that Tribal Anchor Institutions often provide multiple services to Tribal members out of the same building. The various Universal Service Fund (USF) programs each require their own connections and have their own restrictions, which makes providing multiple supported services out of these Anchor Institutions almost impossible. These "stove pipes" need to be broken down so that Tribes can efficiently provide a multitude of services using the same connections. Such efficiency would ultimately save the overall USF program in the long run.

Finally, we recommend that the Commission continually look for opportunities to encourage consortia where this would create efficiencies, as well as simplify and streamline the application and administrative requirements of the program. Specifically, the Commission should encourage school districts and libraries to form partnerships between each other and with potential providers, including non-traditional ones, to increase connectivity, speeds, performance and save financial and administrative resources. While we support the measures the Commission has taken to improve administrative processes, we believe that the Commission should review the administrative process on an ongoing basis to ensure that the processes are as efficient as possible. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this Recommendation.

³ http://transition.fcc.gov/Daily_Releases/Daily_Business/2014/db1117/DOC-330505A1.pdf, p. 4.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Gary Besnick". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "G" and a long, sweeping underline that extends to the left.

Mayor Gary Besnick, Chair of the IAC