

WiFi on School Buses S.2958 (Udall)/HR.6286 (Lujan)

The Council SUPPORTS providing flexibility in E-Rate funding to equip school buses with WiFi

New York is an exceptionally diverse state in terms of technological capabilities. We have one of the largest cities in the world and some of very rural and poor communities throughout vast swaths of upstate New York.

Due to a variety of reasons, largely low population density and high infrastructure costs, many communities lack high speed internet capabilities and WiFi access. At this point into the 21st century, this is unacceptable.

Students rely on technology for learning and interacting with the world around them like never before. This fact is here to stay, but when students don't have sufficient access to the internet, they are at risk of being left behind and never being able to catch up.

Currently, E-Rate is the 4th largest funding federal funding stream for schools. Schools rely on this funding to improve telecommunication services, internet access, maintenance of connections and internal broadband services. This funding stream is particularly valuable for rural and impoverished schools as these schools are eligible for further discounts on these services.

This legislation would authorize the Federal Regulatory Commission to promulgate regulations permitting schools to use E-Rate funding to equip school buses with WiFi. WiFi equipped school buses could help students who are on buses for more than an hour each day, work on homework and other educational obligations. Some districts also park WiFi-equipped buses in neighborhoods, to give students internet access in the evening at their homes.

It is critical that we not leave students behind in this increasing technological society. Internet access is integral to every facet of our society. Incremental steps that improve access to the internet would greatly assist students and help improve their educational outcomes. This is a critical step that will go a long-way.

The Council supports this legislation and urges its approval.