



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

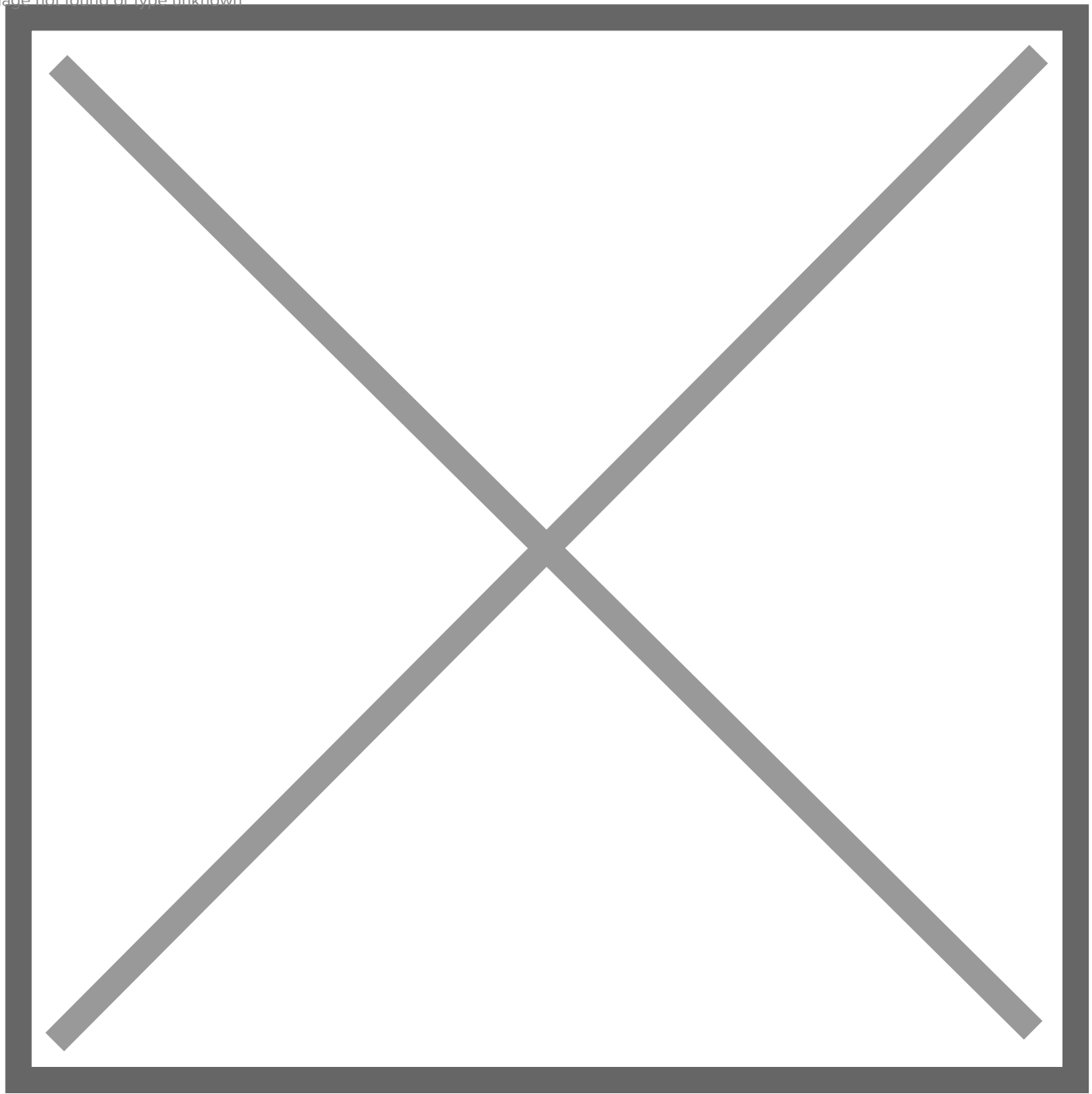
Shelley B. Mayer

NYS Senate Education Chairs Urge the FCC to Expand E-Rate Program to Bridge Digital Divide in Remote Learning

SHELLEY B. MAYER February 18, 2021

| ISSUE: **DISTANCE LEARNING**, **DIGITAL DIVIDE**, **E-RATE**, **HOME INTERNET ACCESS**

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New York -- New York State Senators Shelley B. Mayer, Chair of the Education Committee, and John C. Liu, Chair of the NYC Education Committee, on Tuesday, February 16th [submitted comments](#) to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regarding the use of the E-Rate Program for remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

On February 1, 2021, the FCC posted a [Public Notice](#) seeking comment on Petitions for Emergency Relief to Allow the Use of E-Rate Funds to Support Remote Learning During the COVID-19 Pandemic. The universal service Schools and Libraries Program, also known as “E-Rate,” allows schools and libraries to afford telecommunications and internet access at a discount, ranging from 20-90%, determined by the level of poverty of the student population. The current E-Rate Program regulations restrict the use of the discounted services to physical school or library campuses. This restriction prohibits school districts from obtaining discounted broadband access for students lacking connectivity at their home even though the district might be eligible for up to a 90% discount in telecommunications services.

In their [comments](#) submitted this week, Senators Mayer and Liu urged the FCC to change the regulation that the E-Rate discount may only apply to telecommunications services within the school or library campus. If approved, the change would allow school districts to provide discounted broadband access to students who need it in their homes.

The appeal to the FCC for discounted telecommunications services is the latest effort from Senators Mayer and Liu to address the digital divide in high-quality broadband access that has impeded distance learning for students from middle & low-income families across the state during the coronavirus pandemic. In November 2020, Senator Mayer [introduced](#) the E-LEARN Act, co-sponsored by Senator Liu and a number of other Senators, to provide free, high-quality broadband to every student and school in New York State during the COVID-19 emergency.

Senator Shelley B. Mayer, Chair of the Education Committee, said, “The change in the E-Rate Program regulation is a common sense measure that helps school districts meet the needs of low-income students. Broadband access is not a luxury anymore. Students need high-quality internet to join their classmates on web-based platforms, access academic materials, and do

their homework. I urge the FCC to do the right thing and allow for the E-Rate discount to apply to remote learning telecommunications services.”

Senator John C. Liu, Chair of the NYC Education Committee, said, “The COVID-19 pandemic made it apparent that high quality broadband is an absolute necessity for students to access school and educational opportunities. However, a year later, too many of our students still aren’t connected. FCC approval of the E-Rate discount for student use of broadband services at their homes could be a game changer for our underserved, unconnected kids. The FCC should expand the E-Rate program without delay.”

[Click here](#) for the full comments submitted to the FCC by Senators Shelley Mayer & John Liu