SUPPORT E-RATE: MEET THE NEEDS FOR ACCESS FOR LIBRARY USERS AND STUDENTS OF ALL AGES
National Library Legislative Day
May 2013

- Access to the Internet and related broadband services is essential for everyone in this digital age.
- Libraries are essential in providing broadband and Internet access to the communities and people they serve.
- E-rate enables libraries and schools to afford these vital telecommunications services to better serve the public.

Libraries and schools fully appreciate and utilize the E-rate discount program. Library users and students of all ages benefit from the efforts of Congress and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) for creating, maintaining and supporting the E-rate program. Every state benefits with the deepest discounts going to the poorest communities. Since the program's inception in 1998, public libraries have received approximately $1 billion in funding commitments for Internet access, advanced telecommunications, and related services. School libraries also benefit from the discounts for K-12 public and private schools.

Libraries provide essential public access to the Internet and advanced telecommunications services in two major ways. First, libraries provide no-fee access to computers and the Internet for everyone in their respective communities, including those without access at home or elsewhere. In fact, in 2012, 62 percent of libraries report that in their communities they are the *only* source of free public access to computers and the Internet. Second, nearly all libraries also provide wireless Internet access to their communities.

In our "always on" society, libraries provide remote access to library resources and community and e-government services. Such access is crucial as workforce resources, health information, educational opportunities, and more are increasingly—and often only—available online. E-rate has transformed libraries and services that today go far beyond traditional library services. Libraries offer video-conferencing for job interviews, real-time consulting with volunteer attorneys, and virtual field trips in collaboration with K12 schools. Without the E-rate discounts, our nation's libraries and schools could not afford to provide these vital services for our communities.

But the E-rate fund is under stress. In 2013 the funding cap, determined by the FCC, is $2.38 billion while applicant demand is $4.98 billion. This underfunding has been a chronic problem with the program over many years and this trend will very likely continue as libraries and schools provide more services that require high-capacity bandwidth. It is critical that the E-rate be fully funded so that libraries and schools can continue to meet the needs of the public and our students.

ALA urges Congress, the FCC, and the Executive Branch to include libraries in all broadband and telecommunications programs and to stabilize the E-rate program to meet the needs for public access.