
For Immediate Release

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SHLB Coalition, CoSN, Mobile Beacon, SETDA, Voqal, and Hundreds of Signatories Petition the FCC to Save EBS

*Over 800 public interest, education and commercial signatories emphasize that keeping
EBS educational is vital to close the homework gap*

Washington, D.C. (May 8, 2019) - Today, 830 signatories representing educational institutions, rural operators, public libraries, nonprofit organizations, anchor institutions, individuals and public interest groups from 48 states and the District of Columbia united in [petitioning the Federal Communications Commission \(FCC\)](#) to ensure Educational Broadband Service (EBS) continues to serve its intended educational and public interest purposes. The signatories also ask the FCC to make new EBS licenses available for educational entities and Tribal Nations to connect their communities.

EBS is currently the only licensed spectrum available for educational institutions to serve their communities. Twenty-three years ago, the FCC stopped issuing new EBS licenses, leaving 50 percent of the geography of the United States, primarily rural areas, without access to this portion of the 2.5 GHz band. The FCC is expected to reach a decision this summer about how to make this spectrum available. It has sought comment on whether to give educational and Tribal entities the first opportunity to obtain this spectrum, or whether to proceed immediately to a commercial auction and eliminate the requirement that licenses be held by an educational or nonprofit entity.

The 830 signatories emphasize that EBS is a critical tool for addressing the “homework gap,” or the systematic inequality arising from a student’s inability to access the Internet to complete homework. In 2015, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that [80 percent of eighth-graders](#) used a computer for schoolwork on a weekday, though [7 million American students still lack home Internet access](#). Today, educators use EBS to combat the digital divide and homework gap by building their own broadband networks, creating mobile hotspot lending programs, and providing Wi-Fi on school buses. The petition also highlights the importance of giving educational and Tribal entities an opportunity to obtain new EBS spectrum and drive rural deployment to the same areas in which the commercial sector fails to serve millions of Americans, despite having ample spectrum.

As the one-year mark of the [FCC’s Notice of Proposed Rulemaking](#) approaches on May 9th, educational and public interest groups are weighing in on the gravity and timeliness of this proceeding, given that the FCC is expected to issue a decision on the rulemaking soon.

“Anchor institutions are committed to supporting their communities and helping them flourish, which is why they have the best incentive to close the homework gap using EBS spectrum. Auctioning off EBS to the highest bidder will take away spectrum that schools and Tribal Nations could use to connect hundreds of thousands

of children to high-speed Internet. Large commercial carriers face difficult economics when it comes to building out to unserved or under-served communities - and more spectrum won't change that. The SHLB Coalition urges the FCC to keep EBS educational via priority licensing windows for educational institutions and Tribal Nations."

John Windhausen Jr., Executive Director, the SHLB Coalition

"School districts need new tools for connecting rural, low income and other marginalized students to broadband. The Educational Broadband Service (EBS) offers a way to connect more kids to the online resources they need. CoSN strongly encourages the FCC to not miss this opportunity to close the 'homework gap' by offering new EBS licenses for learning."

Keith Krueger, CEO, CoSN – Consortium for School Networking

"Every time the FCC has granted a waiver to enable an educational entity to obtain EBS spectrum, new broadband networks have been constructed by educators that are providing faster speeds and more affordable service than anything available from the commercial sector in these same areas. This is proof of the power of spectrum policy that enables educational and nonprofit entities to obtain licensed spectrum and use it to serve their communities. It would be catastrophic if the opportunity to replicate these success stories was forever foreclosed in favor of a commercial auction."

Katherine Messier, Executive Director, Mobile Beacon

"SETDA urges the Commission to recognize the potential of EBS to close persistent broadband connectivity gaps and support digital learning for all students both on and off campus. Public-private partnerships can serve as an important tool for state education agencies, school districts, educational service agencies, and other local anchor institutions. Therefore, updating the EBS regulations and establishing new licensing opportunities with the educational component is of paramount importance to the nation's students and schools."

Christine Fox, Deputy Executive Director, State Educational Technology Directors Association (SETDA).

"As strong advocates for a more socially equitable and connected society, Voqal believes the EBS rulemaking presents a unique opportunity for the FCC to close the homework gap and digital divide while also accelerating the deployment of 5G to more Americans. Today's sign-on letter makes clear that keeping EBS educational and licensing the remainder of the band to educators is the best way to deliver on these goals. The letter also demonstrates growing support for licensing windows. In recent weeks, over 60 rural operators have voiced support for priority filing windows at the Commission. Opening educational filing windows is the fastest way the FCC can finish licensing this band, which will immediately allow for more public-private partnerships and self-deployments that have been so successful at closing the digital divide."

Mark Colwell, Director of Telecommunications Policy, Voqal

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About SHLB:

The SHLB Coalition is a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) advocacy organization that supports open, affordable, high-quality broadband connections for anchor institutions and their surrounding communities. The SHLB Coalition is based in Washington, D.C. and has a diverse membership of commercial and non-commercial organizations from across the United States. To learn more, visit www.shlb.org.