

Democrats call on telcos to lift overage fees for students



A group of Democratic senators is calling on the telecom industry to lift their limits and fees associated with heightened broadband use for students in light of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

In a letter addressed to the CEOs of telecom companies including AT&T, Comcast, Verizon, and T-Mobile Friday, senators like Mark Warner (D-VA), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), and Ron Wyden (D-OR) requested that the telecoms temporarily suspend data caps, overage fees, and throttling as students across the country begin remote schooling.

“We have heard from public schools who express appreciation for internet service options that enable remote learning, but are also concerned with ongoing data limitations and continued lack of service for many households,” the senators wrote. “In many situations, online learning activities require additional data allowances beyond plans readily available for students.”

In July, the Federal Communications Commission announced its Keep Americans Connected Pledge, a voluntary promise telecoms could make ensuring that they would continue to provide service and lift overage fees during the pandemic. That pledge ended this summer. In some cases, providers failed to uphold this pledge with their customers.

As the pandemic started to move schooling online in the US earlier this year, school officials noticed that students who attended wealthier schools tended to display better attendance rates compared to those students from less-wealthy backgrounds. This could be due in part to the wealthier students having more access to broadband and technical equipment.

“Our offices have fielded numerous complaints from parents and educators frustrated by usage caps and limited bandwidth, which prevent daily video calls needed to learn and work from home,” the senators wrote. “And those who have no other option find themselves buried in overage fees.”

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