



April 27, 2020

The Honorable Chair Pelowski
491 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St Paul, MN 55155

Re: Support \$8 million Distance Learning Broadband Access Grant Program (HF3029D1)

Dear Chair Pelowski,

My name is Michelle Koffa and I am the Policy Manager at EdAllies, an advocacy organization that works to advance educational equity and remove barriers so all Minnesota students can receive a rigorous and engaging education.

I am writing regarding HF3029 that will be heard in Minnesota Jobs and Economic Division Finance Committee on Monday, April 27. As our state responds to COVID-19, a major barrier that Minnesotan students are facing in being able to engage in distance learning is access to dependable internet and devices. EdAllies conducted a community survey among students and their families and educators to better understand what is needed to implement distance learning plans successfully. Access to technology – both devices and the internet – were ranked at the top.

This has been confirmed by families, students, educators, school leaders, and organizations. We've heard stories of students sharing one device between multiple siblings and spotty internet connections forcing lessons to end early or not begin at all. Over 17% of Minnesota students – most are low-income and rural – do not have any access to the internet.¹ Unless addressed immediately, these barriers to an equitable, rigorous, and engaging education will exacerbate our state's education gaps.

Rep. Eckland's bill (HF3029D1) is one major step that would address student's access to technology and the internet. With distance learning's timeline extended, the bill would appropriate \$8 million to establish a distance learning broadband access grant, which would allow students who are still lacking internet access to engage in distance learning more fully. We fully support this provision, which puts the interests of our students first. Our students are being asked to sacrifice a lot while adapting to a new way of learning and it's important that we continue to provide them the resources they need to succeed during this challenging time.

I encourage you and members of your committee to support the \$8 million distance learning broadband access grant, which is part of HF3029D1, for immediate distance learning needs. Our students cannot wait, and the legislature must act now.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "MK" or similar initials, enclosed in a circular scribble.

¹ Callaghan, P. (March 20, 2020). "What internet providers are doing to keep Minnesotans online during the pandemic." MinnPost



CC: Rep. Ben Lien, Rep. Paul Anderson, Rep. Cal Bahr, Rep. Jeff Brand, Rep. Brian Daniels, Rep. Lisa Demuth, Rep. Bob Gunther, Rep. Sandy Layman, Rep. Dave Lislegard, Rep. Tim Mahoney, Rep. John Persell, Rep. Jeanne Poppe, Rep. Julie Sandstede, Rep. Duane Sauke, and Rep. Lyndon Carlson, Sr.