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Chairman Bobby Scott  
2176 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr.  
2125 Rayburn House Office Building  
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Ranking Member Virginia Foxx  
2101 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Ranking Member Greg Walden  
2322 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives,

On behalf of the Software & Information Industry Association (SIIA), I write to thank you for your work and leadership thus far in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. We do not need to stress the urgency or importance of the moment but want to add our voice to the chorus requesting a swift response to the critical need for an injection of funds to ensure learning continuity for our nation’s learners.

As background, SIIA is the principal trade association for the software and digital content industry. Many of SIIA members work with schools and institutions of higher education to develop and deliver software applications, digital instructional content, online and distance learning services, online assessment, and related technologies.

We echo the calls from our partners in the education space about the critical need for bipartisan support for a plan to address the impact of COVID-19 on the education system especially for things like connectivity for students at home, student meals, online instruction, trauma counseling, and full funding for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Our members have been working around the clock with their school partners to help build out capacity for distance learning programs. Many schools across the U.S. are having to stand up these programs from scratch in just days or weeks to accommodate the need for learning after school closures. This is where schools benefit from strong education technology partners, who can support them in their transition to fully virtual instruction. As news breaks of school closures through the end of the year, it is even more critical that schools and their partners have the
resources necessary to build out these programs to lessen the impact on this generation of American students.

A number of SIIA members are offering discounts or free education technology products. Many are also offering professional learning and other resources for teachers and administrators to learn how to build out and plan for distance learning. These solutions however are only sustainable for so long, and, with many states and districts considering indefinite closure, schools must prepare now for the medium- and long-term. The federal government must establish a K-20 emergency learning continuity fund for states, school districts, and public and private colleges to tap into to establish short- and long-term solutions to save the remainder of the school year.

An Emergency Learning Continuity Fund should be targeted to assist school districts in:

- establishing infrastructure, including platforms, high quality curriculum, and broadband to offer basic online learning and instruction options;
- developing or procuring educational content;
- providing multilingual access and support to teachers and students;
- providing professional development for educators on best practices on teaching in an online environment;
- establishing interim solutions for students without internet access or devices at home;
- hiring outside experts to provide training and professional development to implement strategies for long-term closures;
- technical assistance on how to provide technology for virtual instruction to all students;
- and to ensure school officials have a clear assessment of student achievement and the magnitude of the learning loss expected to occur.

Any funding included this program should be distributed to ensure every student – rural, suburban, and urban – has access to learning and schools are not constrained by a bureaucratic application process to get students back to learning. We urge policymakers to avoid language that would restrict the ability of local institutions to choose partners that offer high quality online learning at scale.
For our part, SIIA launched TechforLearners.org. This new web-based, searchable database offers a variety of education technology solutions to support online learning and remote school administration. At launch, Tech for Learners is designed to assist schools, administrators, and public officials who are scaling up online learning in the wake of facility-closings and other measures taken due to outbreak of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). Coming updates will include resources for parents and learners. Tech for Learners will also highlight companies who are making their products discounted or free to use during this time, as well as links to partner organizations who are leading the way to meet the needs of schools, districts, states, universities, and the workforce.

Thank you for your time. If you have additional questions, please contact Sara Kloek at skloek@siia.net or at 202-789-4448.

Respectfully,

Jeff Joseph
President
Software & Information Industry Association