May 24, 2023

Dear Chairs Cantwell and Lujan and Ranking Members Cruz and Thune,

Thank you for your time and attention on universal Internet access, including the committee's recent hearing on May 11th, titled "The State of Universal Service." As the founder of a startup that uses virtual reality technology to give K-12 students—to date, hundreds of thousands of students in school districts across the country, including Title I schools—experiential learning opportunities in the science, technology, and math fields, I see every day the impact innovative technology and connectivity can have on students.

High-speed Internet connectivity plays a crucial role in making the innovation ecosystem equitable and accessible, not only so that people in all communities can benefit from the technological advances, but also so that students in all schools across the country can become the next generation of technology entrepreneurs. We know the STEM fields have a representation problem, and fixing that problem starts at the K-12 level. As I said recently:

> "Increasingly, underrepresented students and minority students are being left out of [the technology] ecosystem here in the U.S. and around the world. I have done multiple research projects in rural Tennessee, in urban Atlanta, and in rural and urban India. The findings are the same. It is the underrepresented, low-income minority students—who look different in different places—in every single case that get left out of STEM programs. If you layer the gender gap on top of those outcomes, the access discrimination is even more dismal."[1]

At Inspirit, we're incredibly invested in making sure the technologies and opportunities we bring to classrooms aren't furthering the already problematic digital divide. The E-Rate program is a critical piece of closing the digital divide, especially for the members of tomorrow's STEM workforce who are in classrooms today. As was discussed during the hearing, the kinds of innovative solutions provided by the Emergency Connectivity Fund to supply equipment and keep students connected at home are necessary if policymakers want to close the homework gap. And, as Sen. Markey said, "the homework gap is an opportunity gap which ultimately becomes a job gap." To help close that gap, policymakers in Congress and at the Federal Communications Commission need to be creative about getting the students the high-speed connectivity they need to get online and use wireless connected devices that contribute to a 21st century education and create a 21st century workforce.

Thank you for your time and attention, and please let me know if Inspirit can be a resource as you consider how federal programs can close the digital divide and work towards more equitable access to the innovation ecosystem.

Sincerely,
Aditya Vishwanath
Co-Founder and CEO, Inspirit

Cc: Members of the Senate Commerce Subcommittee on Communications, Media, and Broadband

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[1] Ian Rutledge, *#StartupsEverywhere: Aditya Vishwanath, Co-Founder and CEO, Inspirit VR* (Feb. 3, 2023), https://www.engine.is/news/startupseverywhere-paloalto-ca-inspirit.