



For Immediate Release
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LDF Calls on Internet Service Providers to Make Online Learning Accessible for Students of Color Through the Duration of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Today, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) sent a letter to the chief executives of 20 internet service providers requesting they take decisive action to support educational access for hundreds of thousands of disproportionately Black and Latinx children. These children were unable to fully participate in their school curriculum this past spring due to the unaffordability of internet access and data services, lack of reliable internet in their community, lack of access to the technological devices to perform their work, or all of the above. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues and the new school year approaches, LDF calls on these providers to commit to ensuring that online learning is feasible and accessible for students of color throughout the country.

“All children are entitled to a quality public education. Yet, amid the national debate about returning to school during the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been little national attention paid to the reality that countless students, the majority of whom are children of color, are facing substantial educational barriers because of their limited access to the internet and technology,” said Sherrilyn Ifill, LDF’s President and Director-Counsel.

“Any plan to educate America’s children that includes distance learning must address the fact that countless children will be left without educational access unless we undertake an aggressive effort to ensure access to computers and free high-speed internet connection for every family with children. As the new school year approaches, we ask that internet service providers act on their commitments to addressing structural inequalities and racial injustice by taking the series of actions outlined in our letter to help ensure that our nation’s schoolchildren receive the education they deserve.”

Access to the internet and technological devices has been limited for many students of color throughout the duration of the pandemic – and it only stands to worsen as COVID-19’s socioeconomic implications continue to unfold. In April 2020, 54% of Latinx broadband users and 36% of Black users reported worrying about their ability to pay bills over the next few months, compared with only 21% of white users. As pandemic-related government moratoriums on evictions, foreclosures, and utility shutoffs begin to expire and federal unemployment benefits end, many families will soon face more monthly bills and be forced to prioritize immediate necessities, like running water and shelter, over internet access. Children should not be cut off from distance learning simply because their parents cannot afford an internet bill or because rural communities have been forgotten in the age of internet reliance and necessity.

Moreover, this pandemic-induced financial strain comes while many school districts have announced that they will be offering at least some form of distance learning for the foreseeable future — or requiring students to work remotely altogether. Therefore, as the 2020-21 school year approaches, access to online learning remains one of the most pressing needs for students and families of color. While some school districts have distributed

devices to their students or encouraged local businesses to open hotspots, these measures are not nearly enough to meet students' needs.

As a result, LDF is calling on internet service providers to act on their stated commitments to racial equity by expanding their coverage areas and providing free internet access and technology to low-income and communities of color. Specifically, our letter calls on the 10 largest internet providers in the United States, the five largest providers in each state in the Southeast, and the five largest providers in each state or district where a city with a large Black population is located to take the following steps to ensure that children of color have equitable access to the internet and technology throughout the remainder of the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Offer free internet to households with school-age children for the 2020-21 school year and ensure that the service provided is strong enough to support multiple family members streaming classes at the same time.
- Expand internet coverage to “unplugged” areas and invest in necessary infrastructure.
- Provide free wireless hot spot areas that reach beyond building walls where students can safely use devices, particularly in “unplugged” and low-income communities and neighborhoods.
- Forgive any customer arrears that prevent families with children from accessing the internet.
- Provide devices with cellular service to students in areas with cell phone service where internet is impracticable.
- Advertise access to these services widely and aggressively, through flyers and U.S. mail for families with no phones, at school pick up sites, and through phone calls and emails, and ensure that materials are translated and accessible for non-English speakers and people with disabilities.
- Work with school districts to provide free academic content through cable television.

Internet service providers must act swiftly to implement these measures to ensure that all students have the tools to succeed in the coming school year. As an organization deeply familiar with the challenges that face schoolchildren of color and their families face when it comes to achieving a quality, integrated education, we recognize that the digital inequities in this country represent a pressing racial justice issue that must be remedied in order to guarantee students' equal access to quality education.

Read a copy of our letter [here](#).

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Founded in 1940, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) is the nation's first civil and human rights law organization. LDF has been completely separate from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) since 1957—although LDF was originally founded by the NAACP and shares its commitment to equal rights. LDF's Thurgood Marshall Institute is a multi-disciplinary and collaborative hub within LDF that launches targeted campaigns and undertakes innovative research to shape the civil rights narrative. In media attributions, please refer to us as the NAACP Legal Defense Fund or LDF. Follow LDF on [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#).