

In support of H 6666—Dr. Mikaila Mariel Lemonik Arthur

I am writing in support of H 6666 as a research scientist with expertise in education.

Today, access to high-speed Internet service ought to be treated as a necessity of life. Two generations ago, not all members of our communities could count on having access to electric lights or flush toilets, and today, we take these for granted, with programs to help keep the lights on and the water running even when people face economic difficulties (these programs could be strengthened, but at least they exist). Internet access may not be as vital for public health as sanitation is, but it is vital for education and economic opportunity. Most basic tasks in our modern world, whether registering for a COVID-19 vaccine appointment, paying bills, renewing one's state ID, or applying for a job, require—or are vastly easier with—use of the Internet.

And Internet usage is a necessity for academic success. Gone are the days when students completed their first research paper by looking things up in a multivolume set of encyclopedias in the school library. Students who do have high-speed Internet access at home are left struggling to write papers on cracked cellphone screens or are unable to submit their work, limiting their opportunities to learn and grow. Today, students need to begin developing information literacy and research fluency skills even in elementary school in order to ensure that they have the 21st century skills necessary for success in high school, college, and career.

Ensuring that all students in our K-12 public schools have access to high-speed Internet is the least we can do to set our young people on the path to success. It is a step in the right direction. But, I would argue, we need to go further. As a college professor, I see too many of my students struggle to progress in their college coursework because they do not have Internet access at home, and national data collected by the Hope Center for College in 2020 found 17% of Black students and 11% of White students did not have sufficient Internet access to complete their academic work¹. Without high-speed Internet, they are left typing on phones in fast-food parking lots and unable to take online classes that would help them proceed to earn their degrees in a timely fashion. And without high-speed Internet, lower-income adults struggle to access benefits and services as well as to apply for jobs. Widely accessible broadband would address all of these needs along with the needs of our schoolkids.

But K-12 Internet access is a good start. It will ensure that our kids grow up ready for the demands of the future and will reduce the chances that our kids are left to fail simply because they do not have the resources to complete the assignment. Therefore, I am writing in support of this legislation.

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¹ https://hope4college.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/RealCollegeDuringThePandemic_SupplementaryTables.pdf