

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 7, 2020

Brian L. Roberts
Chairman & Chief Executive Officer
Comcast Corporation
Comcast Center
1701 JFK Boulevard
Philadelphia, PA 19103

Dear Mr. Roberts:

We write to ask Comcast to open up millions of Comcast-operated public Wi-Fi networks to American children who lack internet access at home, helping to ensure that these children are not left behind during the COVID-19 pandemic as school classrooms move online across the country.

The COVID-19 pandemic and its related mitigation strategies have shuttered schools across the country, leaving teachers and students forced to navigate the necessary but difficult transition to virtual classrooms. Unfortunately, this new burden is disproportionately borne by the 12 million students in rural and low-income areas of the United States who lack reliable internet access at home. With anchor institutions that traditionally provide internet access to these students, like schools and libraries, now closed for the duration of the pandemic, many of America's children are unable to complete their lessons and will likely fall behind their classmates who can benefit from connectivity and the remote learning it affords.

Fortunately, a significant number of such children, who would otherwise fall victim to this country's widening homework gap, are likely to be within broadcast range of a Comcast Wi-Fi network, but to access it, they must currently buy a pass from Comcast.

Comcast operates one of the largest collections of public Wi-Fi access points in the country — powered by the Wi-Fi routers it rents to its millions of residential and business customers. Comcast has configured these modems — by default — to operate two different Wi-Fi networks. While the first is password-protected for the subscriber, the second is controlled by Comcast and open for public use by any other Comcast Xfinity customer and non-subscribers who pay Comcast for a Wi-Fi access pass, which Comcast sells on an hourly, daily, weekly, or monthly basis.

Comcast has taken important steps to help Americans get connected during this global public health emergency. But it can — and should — do more to help children and teachers in Oregon and across the country. We urge you to start by dropping the paywall and providing free access to Comcast residential public Wi-Fi networks. While Comcast started providing free access to its business customers' Wi-Fi access points on March 13, 2020, the paywall remains on the millions

of Comcast-operated public Wi-Fi networks located in homes and apartment buildings across America.

According to statements that Comcast made to the press, the private and public Wi-Fi networks operated by Comcast's residential Wi-Fi routers are completely separated, both for security reasons and, as Comcast Senior VP of Business Development Tom Nagel has said, so that Comcast's "broadband customers will continue to get the service that they are paying for." However, after Senator Wyden's office asked you to drop the paywall on your residential public Wi-Fi networks, your staff stated that doing so could create Wi-Fi congestion and could impact the speed for paying subscribers' internet connections.

Comcast's excuse simply does not add up. Millions of Comcast's customers pay the company \$14 a month to rent a Wi-Fi router which includes, by default, a Comcast-controlled public Wi-Fi network to which Comcast sells access. If Comcast's previous statements are true, and use of that public Wi-Fi network does not impact the subscriber, it should not matter if the person using it has paid Comcast for a Wi-Fi access pass or if they are a low-income school child trying to do their homework. Alternatively, if use of the public Wi-Fi network can, in fact, impact the subscriber and prevent them from getting the level of service for which they are paying, Comcast has misled their customers.

Comcast is the largest cable internet company in America; it generated \$18.7 billion dollars from high-speed internet access fees in 2019 alone. Particularly in these extremely difficult times, Comcast has a responsibility to do right by the communities in which it does business. To that end, please provide us with answers to the following questions by May 22, 2020 to help Congress assess Comcast's ability to open up millions of public Wi-Fi networks for the benefit of school children across the country:

1. How many Comcast subscribers rent a cable modem / Wi-Fi router from Comcast?
2. How many of these subscribers have opted to disable the public Wi-Fi network in their Comcast-supplied cable modem / WiFi router, which Comcast enables by default?
3. How much revenue did Comcast earn in 2017, 2018, and 2019 from cable modem / WiFi router rental fees?
4. How much revenue did Comcast earn in 2017, 2018, and 2019 selling Wi-Fi On Demand Passes to people accessing Comcast residential public Wi-Fi networks?
5. Please identify the manufacturer and model of each cable modem / WiFi router provided by Comcast that is currently used by more than 500,000 Comcast residential high-speed internet subscribers. For each of these models, please identify whether or not Comcast has configured the subscriber's Wi-Fi network and the Comcast-operated public Wi-Fi network to:
 - a. Use different DOCSIS service flows or downstream channels?
 - b. Rate-limit and prioritize traffic, so that the subscriber's internet uploads and downloads get priority?
6. Please identify the specific performance issues that you anticipate would impact Comcast subscribers and their ability to get the level of service for which they pay if Comcast removed the paywall on its residential public Wi-Fi networks. For each issue you

identify, please explain why the use today of a subscriber's public network by someone who has purchased an access pass from Comcast does not cause the same problem.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator