

Durbin Discusses Broadband Access During COVID-19 Pandemic With Leadership Council Of Southwestern Illinois

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SPRINGFIELD – U.S. Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) today virtually joined the Leadership Council of Southwestern Illinois for their monthly Board of Directors meeting to discuss the COVID-19 pandemic’s impact on the region and expanding access to broadband. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) estimates that 21 million Americans lack high-speed internet access, but with the FCC relying on flawed broadband mapping data, the number of Americans without internet access is likely much higher. To ensure that accurate data is used to seek solutions around broadband access, Durbin cosponsored the Broadband DATA Act, which was signed into law in March, to overhaul the mapping process and better identify which geographical areas truly lack access and require more investment.

On the call, Durbin also spoke about the pandemic’s impact on students’ education as many school districts opted for remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. A 2020 Pew Research study found that 35 percent of children in households earning less than \$30,000 a year and 25 percent of Black teens do not have access to reliable internet

connection. To address this disparity, Durbin introduced the [Computer and Internet Access Equity Act](#) to strengthen the FCC's Lifeline Program, which subsidizes monthly broadband and telephone service for low-income households, and establishes a refundable, lifetime technology tax credit, capped at \$10,000, to help families afford technology purchases. Durbin also cosponsored the [Emergency Educational Connections Act](#) to provide the FCC's E-Rate program with \$4 billion for schools and libraries to support hotspots, modems, routers, and internet-enabled devices.

“Now, more than ever, Congress must act to close the digital divide. In 2020 and especially during a pandemic, we are relying on broadband connections to communicate with health care professionals and help our kids complete their coursework,” said Durbin. “We must keep fighting to bring quality, affordable broadband services to communities in need, which will create jobs, boost productivity, and expand economic opportunity.”