

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Chairman, we all want to protect children and provide them with safe communities in which to grow. To achieve this worthy goal, we must work with local governments, schools and libraries. The amendment before us is not helpful. A new mandate would set regulations that would be nearly impossible to meet and would deprive schools of sorely needed funds.

The most important action Congress has taken to promote both the goal of quality education and connections to the broader world through the Internet is to be found in the Telecommunications Act of 1996. This special education rate, known as the E-rate, was part of the Federal Universal Service Fund providing important discounts of 20 to 90 percent on telecommunications services, Internet access and internal communications for public schools, public and private, as well as our library systems. It enjoys broad bipartisan support.

No one advocates allowing children access to pornographic materials, but this amendment is simply too draconian. Assuring that the children's Internet activity is safe is most appropriately made at the local level, not one by a new Federal mandate. There is no need for the amendment. We should recognize that students accessing the Internet from their local library or schools typically are receiving as much or more supervision than what occurs commonly in some homes.

This amendment imposes extraordinary financial and administrative burdens on schools and libraries as well as the risk of liability for the technical and constitutional shortcomings of filtering technology. The purchasing, installing and maintenance of this software is expensive and administratively burdensome at a time when most schools and libraries are struggling just to connect to the Internet. It allows only 30 days for districts and libraries to comply with the law after the FCC has promulgated the rules. With every State setting different procurement laws, there is no possible way schools and libraries all across the country could come up to speed, write an RFP, wait the allotted time for incoming bids, choose a provider, install the software, and provide the training, all within 30 days.

After giving us an impossible deadline, the amendment requires schools that fail to meet the requirements repay the full amount of universal service assistance back to the date the failure began. Retroactive repayment of universal service support for noncompliance is unrealistic.

Across the Nation, communities are already working to assure that children's Internet access is properly guided. They are utilizing all the options available to them and choosing those that best meet the needs of those local communities. We ought to trust our local library boards and school boards. Imposing a Federal mandate is inappropriate and unnecessary.

