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## **Stay Connected**

Hello my name is Halle Bonner, and I'm a student at the New York City College of Technology. During my Freshman year of college New York City was hit with the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic impacted my family and I in many negative ways both mentally and financially. The greatest challenge I faced as a result of the pandemic was lack of reliable internet access and the inability to afford to access internet services such as WiFi. Without the ability to access the internet I was unable to keep up with my coursework or reach out for substantial help since all of my courses were now online, and the only way to get in contact with someone was via email. I know I was not alone in this, this is why today I'm speaking out to all of the college/highschool students and even professors but especially my discourse community which are people who has a passion for visuals and fashion design or even technology, around New York City we're having difficulties maintaining internet connections due to the pandemic and living in low income communities like mine.

All the local community based places that offered free wifi such as the library or nearby coffee shops like Starbucks were closed completely or did not allow people to stay and sit down due to COVID-19 restrictions. As a result of this issue, people weren't able to stay in the store to access the internet in order to conduct business or work on school assignments which is something I would have been able to use these places for. You guys may not think this issue is serious enough to get head over heels over but let me tell you why it's affecting us so much.

According to USA Today “ Since schools shut down in the spring, districts have scrambled to distribute laptops and internet so students can engage in schooling from home. But almost a year later, with no end in sight for virtual learning, millions of students still lack reliably fast internet or a working computer – the basic tools to participate in live lessons from home. The digital divide is complicated to solve. The cost of broadband is out of reach for many families.

High-speed internet lines are scarce in rural areas. And there's little good and consistent data on the extent of internet connectivity – something the federal government could have taken the lead on years ago, but didn't.” Even though the world and society is trying to forget the past and step into a brighter future, this issue still remains unsolved.

The fact that I could not afford to pay for my WIFI highlighted the “digital divide” between the wealthy and people who have less money. The simple lack of WIFI could affect my future and my ability to learn. In addition, I realized that there is also a need for an art and fashion community that can meet, exchange ideas, and see each other’s work. I believe as citizens of New York City we should stand up and let our voices be heard about this matter. The mayor of our community should be willing to hear our cries and concerns about the lack of WIFI in low income minority communities. Instead of letting us suffer for so long. I hope my speech informed you all about this issue that’s been affecting us for years and I hope my words of encouragement gives you all a voice to speak about and spread awareness to someone you know who’s also been affected by this.

