

Empowerment Program to Address the Digital Divide in Underserved Communities

The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors (Board) has implemented several initiatives to address matters of equity and inclusion affecting communities of color. Most recently, the Board adopted the motion “Establishing an Antiracist Los Angeles County Policy Agenda” (Supervisor Ridley-Thomas, July 21, 2020). The Board has also adopted motions and prioritized strategies to bridge the digital divide that exists between communities that have sufficient access to computer devices and broadband technologies and those that are disadvantaged (Supervisors Kathryn Barger and Hilda L. Solis, October 13, 2020).

According to 2019 United States Census data, the median annual household income in the State of California is \$80,440. The estimated annual household income in Los Angeles County is \$72,797, yet more than 1.1 million households have incomes totaling less than \$50,000. In some cities and communities within the County, more than 50% of all households have incomes below \$50,000. Additionally, the 2019

MOTION

SOLIS _____

RIDLEY-THOMAS _____

KUEHL _____

HAHN _____

BARGER _____

Census data estimates that 5.5% of households in Los Angeles County do not have a computer and 11.9% lack a broadband internet subscription. These households are disproportionately located in low income areas and the populations are predominately Black and Latino.

Access to computer devices and broadband connectivity are critical initial steps to bridging the digital divide. However, equally important is having the knowledge and awareness of how to effectively utilize and navigate the vast resources available through technology. The combination of access and awareness can expand opportunities for growth, achievement and advancement among disadvantaged populations.

The Internal Services Department (ISD) is the lead County agency for delivering information technology (IT) services and administering centralized business relations as the County's Purchasing Agent. ISD is well positioned to help facilitate efforts to reduce the digital divide by utilizing its extensive knowledge and experience in the field of information technology and its professional relationships with various businesses, organizations and networks.

ISD has conceptualized a new program to empower youth and small businesses in underserved communities that are adversely impacted by the digital divide and connect them to technology, resources and opportunities. The program includes the following elements:

- Establish partnerships with government agencies, technology companies, business and non-profit organizations, local schools, and academic institutions that sponsor or support social responsibility programs benefitting disadvantaged and underserved communities that are adversely impacted by the digital divide.

- Facilitate continuous exposure of IT-related and economic social responsibility programs and opportunities to youth and businesses in underserved communities.
- Assist in engaging youth to learn and develop IT-related skills that can lead to well-paying career paths and entrepreneurship in the field of information technology.
- Set up and maintenance of a limited number of computer workstations at designated County facilities in underserved communities where youth who lack a computer and broadband access can participate in program instruction.
- Identify local small businesses in underserved communities that lack an online presence and assess their interest in obtaining assistance to develop a website or social media profile.
- Coordinate projects that allow youth to gain experience applying their IT-based skills by supporting diverse small businesses in their communities that lack an internet presence, such as designing websites, social media profiles, and geographical information system (GIS) mapping tools.
- Explore incentives to financially support the program, including corporate donors, philanthropists, grants, scholarships, internships, and employment resources.
- Measure the progress and outcomes of youth and businesses participating in the program.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors:

1. Authorize the Internal Services Department to establish the proposed program to empower youth and small businesses in underserved communities that are adversely impacted by the digital divide and connect them to technology, resources and

opportunities.

2. Direct the Internal Services Department, in consultation with County Counsel, Department of Consumer and Business Affairs, Department of Children and Family Services, Department of Workforce Development, Aging and Community Services, the Office of Diversion and Re-entry's Youth Development and Diversion, and the Los Angeles County Office of Education, to report back in 90 days with a program implementation plan.

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