

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR HILDA L. SOLIS

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**Addressing Digital Disparities Among Foster Youth**

With a child welfare system of more than 30,000 youth, Los Angeles County must ensure the safety and development of youth in and transitioning out of foster care.

Particularly, the social, educational, and workforce development of youth is vital to their overall well-being. Los Angeles County has a responsibility to provide quality care to all under its purview, and that must include adapting to an ever-changing world.

Given the digital demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the inability to access internet can preclude one from fully participating in a society where many facets of life are increasingly performed online. Many current and former foster youth nationwide lack access to cellphones, laptops, and other digital devices. Many do not have reliable service plans and must resort to temporary phones that fail to provide even a stable contact number. Youth in Los Angeles County face these same problems. This lack of access can, in effect, prevent them from learning about employment opportunities and can act as a barrier to educational and social advancement. Additionally, cellphones can greatly improve youth’s ability to maintain connections with their communities and

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establish support networks – all of which help ensure normalcy and enable youth to have fulfilling experiences. As such, the need for internet access is not at all superficial. It is an equity issue and the digital disparities must be addressed.

iFoster is a nonprofit organization that has worked diligently over many years to better the lives of foster youth. In April 2019, the California Public Utilities Commission allocated \$22 million for iFoster to implement the Phones for Foster Youth Program, a pilot project under the Federal Communications Commission’s LifeLine program. This program, in partnership with Boost Mobile, will provide a free smartphone – complete with a stable service plan, wireless internet, and mobile hotspots – to approximately 33,000 current and former youth between the ages of 13 and 26 across the state of California. Los Angeles County must work to ensure this exciting opportunity extends to its residents who have experienced foster care.

**I, THEREFORE, MOVE** that the Board of Supervisors direct the Department of Children and Family Services, in collaboration with iFoster and in consultation with labor partners, to:

1. Implement the Phones for Foster Youth Program, including promotion and outreach to ensure awareness and utilization of the program.

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