

MOTION BY SUPERVISORS HILDA L. SOLIS  
AND SHEILA KUEHL

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**Developing Digital Divide Regional Strategic Plan**

The Digital Divide is a socio-economic and equity issue for households in LA County that do not have broadband access, limiting their ability to function successfully in a world more dependent on receiving critical information and services over the Internet. The Digital Divide has been exacerbated during COVID-19 as workplaces and schools have shut down and forced people to work from home. The 2019 census data estimates that 5.5% of households do not have a computer or internet access, and 11.9% lack a broadband internet subscription. Families that do not have broadband access and/or computers at home are at a severe disadvantage to effectively work and learn remotely. Moreover, even if they have devices, they may not have adequate training on using these devices effectively. This also impacts their abilities to use County digital services such as telehealth, social, justice, library, and business services. This eventually may contribute to and perpetuate existing socio-economic inequalities, including housing instability, disparities in access to health and mental health services, and educational attainment.

County departments are already implementing Digital Divide initiatives in response to various Board Motions, including “Empowerment Program to Address the Digital Divide in Underserved Communities” dated October 27, 2020, and “Establishing pathways to equitable access to high-speed internet and bridging the Digital Divide” dated October 13, 2020. The Internal

**MOTION**

MITCHELL	_____
KUEHL	_____
HAHN	_____
BARGER	_____
SOLIS	_____

Services Department 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 Department of Public Works, in coordination with the Departments of Regional Planning; Workforce Development, Aging, and Community Services (WDACS); and County Counsel has created work groups to streamline permitting; public/private partnerships for incentivizing private investment and local, state, and federal grants; workforce development; general plan review; strategies for free or low-cost internet and innovative strategies for broadband infrastructure.

However, as the Digital Divide is a multi-dimensional problem deeply interconnected with other socio-economic issues, it requires that the County adopt a centralized strategy and include regional partners in addition to County departments, such as cities, private sector innovators, academia, and community-based organizations. The strategy must identify community needs through an inclusive outreach effort and ultimately enable sustainable solutions that will bridge the Digital Divide gap to provide all households in LA County the same opportunity to access and receive crucial information and services. The strategic planning efforts must focus on a holistic, sustainable solution with the following guiding principles:

1. Equitable access of broadband solutions to all communities;
2. Sustainable solutions to provide all County households the same opportunity to access and receive crucial information and services;
3. Secured solutions addressing internet security and privacy issues; and
4. Inclusive approach involving ecosystem stakeholders – private, public, community partners.

As the strategic plan will involve diverse stakeholders with varying interests, it is important to have unbiased, inclusive consensus among stakeholders. The strategic plan outcomes must ensure broadband access to ALL residents, devices for ALL residents and digital literacy for ALL residents. These solutions require private capital investment options to provide sustainability, in addition to limited one-time grants.

**WE, THEREFORE, MOVE** that the Board of Supervisors:

1. Direct the County Chief Information Officer (CIO), in coordination with the Departments of Internal Services, Regional Planning, Public Works, Consumer and Business Affairs, WDACS, County Counsel, and other relevant departments, to develop and implement a County Internal Action Plan in 90 days that, at a minimum:
  - a. Aggregates all existing and planned Digital Divide efforts by County departments;
  - b. Identifies common strategic objectives among the various efforts and ensures coordinated implementation of the various efforts;
  - c. Standardizes the reporting on activities and outcomes, including an evaluation of utilizing visual dashboards to track progress;
  - d. Identifies gaps and limitations, including resource and funding constraints, that will assist in the strategic development and prioritization of future initiatives.
2. Direct the CIO, in coordination with the above-listed departments, as well as external stakeholders including cities, private sector partners, community based organizations, school districts, nonprofits, venture capitalists and others to develop and begin implementing a Comprehensive Regional Digital Divide Strategy for the County and provide progress updates quarterly that, at a minimum:
  - a. Establishes regional priorities, goals, and objectives to tackle the Digital Divide, including short-, medium- and long-term strategies.
  - b. Identifies and develops sustainable solutions for persistent inequity in access to digital resources;
  - c. Identifies and involves stakeholders and community partners in the inclusive development of such sustainable, equity-based solutions;
  - d. Establishes transparent criteria to measure success and track progress against the target metrics;

- e. Explores and secures short- and long-term investment and funding opportunities from state and federal sources, venture capitalists and regional investors, in addition to philanthropic partnerships and grant funding;
  - f. Identifies local, state, and federal policies that are essential to bridging the Digital Divide; and
  - g. Leverages best practices and synergies from other local, state and federal government efforts.
- 3. Authorize the Chief Executive Officer to retain a consultant to assist the CIO to convene departments and regional stakeholders in a results-oriented discussion to solve common Digital Divide.
- 4. Direct the CEO's Legislative Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations branch to support state and federal legislation, and advocate for legislative and regulatory changes, that support the objectives of this motion, the County Internal Action Plan, and the Comprehensive Regional Digital Divide Strategy.