

MOTION BY SUPERVISORS KATHRYN BARGER
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SUPPORTING DIGITAL EQUITY THROUGHOUT THE COUNTY

The COVID-19 public health crisis and the Safer at Home orders in Los Angeles County demonstrated vast disparities caused by digital inequity. One of the major issues exacerbating the digital divide was the lack of universal access to fast, reliable, and affordable broadband in every household. Since then, Federal and State officials have undertaken numerous initiatives to address broadband access especially within vulnerable populations and communities with concentrated disadvantages. The solutions for equitable access to broadband have been divided into either urban or rural areas. Dividing the issue by geography, government agencies are developing ways to provide access to funding based on the distinct approaches needed for different areas.

Through numerous motions and initiatives, the Board of Supervisors has advanced its commitment to meaningfully address the digital divide. County agencies have been directed by the Board to pursue all available options to develop robust action plans for equitable adoption of broadband. The County’s Internal Services Department and Chief Information Officer have been working with stakeholders and numerous county agencies to develop necessary relationships with government, philanthropy, community leaders, and industry partners. And through once-in-a-generation Federal and State funding, the County is pursuing coordinated efforts to maximize funding eligibility and increase investments for broadband access.

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The stakeholders and advocates working on broadband access have made significant inroads in these efforts within the urban areas of Los Angeles County. Through strong collaboration with the City of Los Angeles, the County has quickly moved forward to begin to pilot innovative approaches to connect underserved communities. We need similar collaboration in other cities and throughout the unincorporated regions of the County. The efforts to address broadband access in urban and rural communities, including those that are less-resourced and less-populated, are varied and will require different strategies and funding sources. As the County continues to move forward with its efforts to delete the digital divide, we must ensure parity for our communities in all our pilot programs and initiatives.

WE, THEREFORE, MOVE THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:

1. Direct the Director of the Internal Services Department and the newly established County Director of Digital Equity to report back to the Board in writing in 90 days with an equitable process to ensure that pilot broadband infrastructure projects are introduced in each Supervisorial District. The process and plan for identifying each pilot project location should include feedback from each of the Board offices and key regional stakeholders (such as Councils of Government and Town Councils); and should ensure equitable access for both densely populated urban areas and underserved rural communities in the County.
2. Direct the Director of the Internal Services Department to reach out to cities throughout the County that are interested in collaborating on digital equity efforts and begin the process of entering into MOUs with those cities willing to participate.
3. Direct the Director of the Internal Services Department and the County Director of Digital Equity, in collaboration with the Chief Information Officer, the Department of Regional Planning, the Department of Public Works, and any other relevant county departments, to establish a working group to engage stakeholders in each Supervisorial District to collaborate and advocate for broadband access in the rural unserved and underserved communities throughout the County.

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