

REVISED MOTION BY SUPERVISOR HOLLY J. MITCHELL

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Co-Creating a Digital Equity Roadmap for Los Angeles County

Los Angeles County (County), like many other counties, faces a significant digital divide, further widened by the COVID-19 pandemic, as many everyday activities and services transitioned online. The U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey 2019 1-Year Estimates reveal that even before the COVID-19 pandemic, 390,957 (11.7 percent) households in the County lacked an internet subscription, and 181,767 (5.5 percent) did not have a computer. These digital disparities have disproportionately impacted lower-income households, particularly Black, Latino, Indigenous, and People of Color, those with lower educational levels, and older adults (ages 65 and above) throughout the County. For these households, lack of access to the internet and technology is not just a digital divide, but a barrier to accessing healthcare, education, employment opportunities, social services, and social connection. In response, the County Board of Supervisors has taken proactive steps to increase digital literacy and internet access, including adopting several motions that direct the Internal Services Department (ISD) to advance digital equity throughout the County.

ISD, in a strong partnership with the Aging and Disabilities Department, the County Library, the Parks and Recreation Department, and various local government agencies, community partners, and stakeholder organizations, has made a meaningful community

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impact. Together, they promoted digital equity and inclusion for households most affected by the digital divide in the County. This effort included deploying digital inclusion programs, resources, and services extensively during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic and as part of recovery initiatives. Specifically, the County allocated millions of American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 funds across the region to boost digital equity and mitigate the economic and health setbacks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the broader recession. Key achievements included:

- a) Launching the Delete the Divide Initiative and recruiting, training, and hiring over 300 technology interns, providing them with credentials, work experience, mentorship, training, and industry-relevant skills essential for full-time, high-quality job placements.
- b) Increasing access to internet-enabled devices, digital usage, and adoption by distributing more than 6,200 laptops to households most affected by the digital divide.
- c) Providing over 17,100 hours of digital literacy and skills training to boost the capacity, knowledge, and skills of households most affected by the digital divide.
- d) Engaging over 9,000 K-12 students across the County on Tech Empowerment Day, increasing exposure to STEM careers at an early age.
- e) Establishing the Community Broadband Networks Initiative and forming a public-private partnership with WeLink Communications to provide affordable and reliable broadband internet to underserved areas affected by the digital divide in East Los Angeles/Boyle Heights and South Los Angeles.
- f) Launching the Intergovernmental Broadband Coordinating Committee (IBCC) and recruiting over 60 multi-sector stakeholder organizations to join the IBCC and collaborate Countywide to close the digital gap.
- g) Developing the IBCC Digital Equity Community Ambassadors Program, which involved recruiting six residents to participate in and contribute to County IBCC meetings by sharing their ideas, lived experiences, and thoughts about digital inclusion resources and services.
- h) Achieving recognition as a two-year Visionary National Digital Inclusion Trailblazer by the National Digital Inclusion Alliance.

This collective effort and key achievements have significantly reduced the digital divide across the County, showcasing the strength of regional collaboration among public, private, and non-profit sectors and various issue areas. Since 2021 and the onset of the County's efforts to close the digital divide, the share of County households without an internet subscription has been cut in half (falling from 11.7 percent to 5.8 percent), and the share of households without a computer has decreased by nearly the same amount (from 5.5 percent to 2.9 percent). Although there is still work to do, these figures mark meaningful progress and demonstrate the tangible positive impacts and effectiveness of the County's digital equity investments.

Under ISD's leadership, the next step was to replicate and expand the County's broadband infrastructure and digital equity efforts using Federal and State funds from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). IIJA established the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program, offering \$42.45 billion nationwide to increase high-speed internet access through planning, infrastructure deployment, and adoption initiatives across the country. The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) allocated approximately \$1.86 billion in BEAD Program grants to the California Public Utilities Commission to support statewide broadband infrastructure expansion, including projects within the County. The current California BEAD Program Map indicates that the County is eligible for minimal BEAD Program funding, as many locations across the County are listed 'served,' meaning they already have access to adequate broadband services. The BEAD Program prioritizes unserved locations, then underserved locations, and lastly community anchor institutions for funding.

Additionally, in May 2025, the Federal Administration terminated the Digital Equity Act (DEA), which was part of the IIJA. The DEA offered \$1.25 billion in Federal and State grant funding from NTIA to promote digital equity and inclusion nationwide. Under the DEA funding, in September 2024, ISD mobilized 37 IBCC member organizations and applied for \$25.6 million from the Federal Digital Equity Competitive Grant Program. However, the sudden and unprecedented termination of the DEA by the Federal government and the lack of BEAD Program funding have fundamentally shifted the landscape and role of the IBCC.

This presents an opportunity for the County to redefine its commitment to digital equity

and to affirm a Digital Equity Roadmap to move forward. The County should focus on long-term strategic planning and sustainable funding by creating a regional Digital Equity Roadmap. This Roadmap, which has the potential to transform the County's digital landscape, will not only guide digital equity and inclusion efforts across the County in the post-COVID-19 era but also play a key role in encouraging regional coordination and collaboration among involved entities. It represents a significant step toward ensuring full digital equity for every household in the County. Using the Countywide IBCC as a catalyst, the Digital Equity Roadmap will help ISD, as the lead County department, to coordinate digital equity activities and solutions across various issue areas and sectors. Moreover, developing the Digital Equity Roadmap will identify existing assets and resources within the ecosystem that can be shared and expanded through collaborative partnerships, promoting further collective action and impact.

I THEREFORE MOVE THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:

- 1) Recognize and proclaim October 6 - 10, 2025, as National Digital Inclusion Week in Los Angeles County (County), highlighting Community-Driven Digital Futures as the theme.
- 2) Direct the Director of the Internal Services Department (ISD), in coordination with the Countywide Intergovernmental Broadband Coordinating Committee, the Chief Executive Officer, the Superintendent of Schools for the Los Angeles County Office of Education, the Acting Director of the Department of Aging and Disabilities, the County Librarian, the Director of Parks and Recreation, and the directors of other relevant County Departments to:
 - a) Convene a Countywide kick-off event during National Digital Inclusion Week (October 6–10, 2025), in coordination with regional community partners and stakeholder organizations, to formally launch development of the County's three-year Digital Equity Roadmap and reaffirm the County's commitment to closing the digital divide. Stakeholders should include community-based organizations, County departments and County-related agencies, educational institutions, healthcare organizations, local government entities, non-profit organizations, workforce development organizations, and other entities whose services

to communities and constituents are impacted by the digital divide. This process should be equity-focused and inclusive, and should result in the production of a three-year, action-oriented regional Digital Equity Roadmap. The Digital Equity Roadmap will be based on existing quantitative and qualitative data sources, including, but not limited to the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey, the County Digital Needs Survey, and the California Digital Equity Plan. The Digital Equity Roadmap should include:

1. A comprehensive digital equity inventory of current digital equity assets, including programs, resources, infrastructure, and services funded by the County, as well as those assets financed by external community partners and stakeholder organizations, to facilitate collaboration and partnership opportunities. The inventory should be publicly available and published within 240 days;
2. Tangible high-impact digital equity opportunities, solutions, and strategies that can be deployed for regional implementation;
3. A detailed vision statement, goals, guiding principles, outputs, and outcomes for ongoing development and implementation of regional digital inclusion activities;
4. Recommendations for a regional digital equity funding strategy that ensures the long-term sustainability of digital inclusion initiatives within the ecosystem; and
5. A report back to the Board in writing within 120 days on progress to date.

~~3) Direct the Director of ISD to compile and publish a comprehensive inventory of County-funded digital equity programs, services, and infrastructure, as well as assets financed by external community partners, within 240 days. The inventory should be made publicly accessible.~~

4) 3) Direct the Director of ISD to report back to the Board in writing within 365 days with the "Digital Equity Roadmap" that includes recommendations,

implementation strategies, and key partners, that could be adopted by the Board.

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