

**Subject: Pass ESHB 1336 – Washington State PTA request – digital equity**



Dear Honorable Members of the Washington State Senate,

On behalf of Washington State PTA, the state's largest child advocacy association, we encourage you to pass ESHB 1336, creating and expanding unrestricted authority for public entities to provide broadband services to end users.

We believe ESHB 1336 is complementary to 2SSB 5383, Senator Wellman's broadband bill, which Washington State PTA supports as amended in the House policy committee. The association supports the passage of both bills this session as a way of bridging the digital divide that was so significantly exposed during this pandemic.

That said, the digital divide existed long before COVID-19 shut down our schools and economy in March 2020: more than 280,000 children in Washington had no broadband at home, and more than 117,000 had no computers. This digital divide is widespread, affecting 15% of metropolitan and 26% of rural households. Overall, 68% of school districts from across the state reported last fall to OSPI that at least some of their students had no access to broadband services or smartphone data.

This is an equity issue for Washington State PTA. Native American, Black, and Latinx students are twice as likely to lack access to computers and broadband at home. High percentages of these students have been in remote learning settings as their districts seek to reopen to in-person learning safely.

When Washington State PTA members adopted a position (listen to our short position video here) last fall in support of "increasing educational equity by closing the digital divide," they included support for legislation, policies and funding that ensures equitable digital inclusion and access for all students, families, and staff, regardless of geographic location, including:

- Robust, up-to-date, universal broadband infrastructure;
- Affordable broadband internet service; and
- Developmentally appropriate internet-enabled devices.

And that is why we support and encourage you to pass ESHB 1336 and E2SHB 1365 (devices), as well as provide funding as an investment and a match to federal funds that will support any and all efforts that seize this moment in time to make broadband universal, accessible, and affordable across the state.

Sincerely,

Janice Kutzera, WSPTA President and Sherry Rudolph, WSPTA Advocacy Director