

October 27, 2023

Governor Inslee
Office of the Governor
PO Box 40002
Olympia, WA 98505

Re: Digital Equity Investments

Dear Governor Inslee,

Our cross-sector coalition is driven by the unprecedented opportunity to bring together resources from federal, state, municipal, and tribal governments, as well as community and business assets, to close the digital divide. The 10-Year Plan to Dismantle Poverty includes digital equity as a foundational component of Washingtonians' well-being and Executive Order 22-04 established digital equity as a priority. An equitable and robust digital equity ecosystem is vital for Washingtonians to thrive and reach their maximum potential.

Our goal is that every Washingtonian has access to the internet capacity they need, at a price they can pay, with the tools and training to understand how to use it safely and for the benefit of work, education, self and community care. You have said "access to broadband is the single most important economic development tool in our toolkit right now, and the most necessary to our state." We are grateful for this acknowledgement and for the federal and state investments in broadband expansion, digital skills, and devices. This letter invites a closer consideration of the magnitude and type of support that is needed to fully embed digital equity best practices in state agency and tribal government services so that we reach Washingtonians across the lifespan with critical services for education, health, safety, and economic opportunity.

Washington State is making great strides in strengthening our digital equity ecosystem through broadband deployment and adoption and by reaching residents in need with digital skills and devices. For example, House Bill 1365 funded the Office of Superintendent's Digital Equity and Inclusion grants that funded 18.6 million dollars in educational technology to schools across the state. This funding also supported districts' efforts in focusing on meeting students' needs with inclusionary and adaptive technology. We are also inventorying our existing assets, making them discoverable by our communities, and strategizing how to address digital divides sustainably. The State Broadband Office is currently developing two plans that represent an unprecedented planning and investment opportunity to provide digital equity for all, the Broadband Equity Access and Deployment Plan (BEAD) and the Digital Equity Plan.

We have identified key areas of need that require state leadership to further advance digital equity in Washington. Only 29% of eligible Washington households have enrolled in the Federal Communication Commission's Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP). Enrollment in ACP means that hardworking families across Washington, small business owners, veterans, and

seniors are all able to receive financial assistance to afford high-speed internet. An NTIA report finds factors that influence non-use of ACP include lack of digital skills or issues with accessibility. This is why trusted community digital navigators are necessary to reach the most vulnerable in our community. We believe we can increase ACP uptake, thereby increasing access to services and reaching more eligible Washingtonians with benefits, by fully equipping our state agencies and directly investing in tribal governments to embed digital equity into their services. This work needs to occur in collaboration with community partners, Tribes, and local jurisdictions, especially in areas where digital navigation has recently lost funding.

Last year's investment in Digital Navigator Program grants demonstrated how we reach more people and provide better support when we coordinate across state, local, and tribal governments and with community-based organizations. The Digital Navigator Program was only partially funded in the current operating budget, and it remains unclear how programs like this will be sustained through an economic downturn. The anticipated Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) funds for digital equity implementation are not coming to the State immediately and fall very short of the needs.

Agencies across state government have submitted decision package proposals that taken together begin to embed equity in state government. We ask you to approve furthering the decision packages that allow state agencies to advance digital equity. Below is a sampling of these decision packages and their projected impact:

- **Washington State University Extension:** 2 statewide FTE, \$950,000 per year includes Broadband Action Team support. Support for technical and project applications, digital equity, special focus on un/underserved, tribal communities, through statewide capacity and 40 local offices.
- **DSHS/Technology Innovation Administration:** \$1,908,000 and 10 FTEs to support Digital Equity Coordination, provide equitable information technology access to the public and state employees, including individuals with disabilities, and drive DSHS toward becoming a digitally equitable agency.
- **Commerce:** 0 FTE, \$15,000,000, Digital Equity-focused Navigation. These funds will be used to fund new and existing Digital Navigator programs by contracting with organizations that have a track record of successfully deploying digital navigation and literacy activities with underserved individuals and households, serving an estimated 213,000 additional clients with digital navigation services. Digital navigation is critical to ensure those furthest from opportunity in our community have the support they need to access quality low-cost internet, a device, and digital skills.
- **WaTech:** 2 FTEs, \$1,031,000 for FY 2025 and \$531,000 annually FY 26 and beyond (1,562,000 initial ask) This proposes establishment of an IT accessibility program within WaTech to assist state agencies in meeting state and federal obligations to provide reasonable accommodations to people with disabilities, thus making Washington State's public services truly accessible to all.
- **Washington State Library:** 0 FTE, \$500,000, Supplemental budget: LibTech. Funding will continue the LibTech consortium program started in 2022 with ARPA funds, WSL

has been purchasing and working with rural libraries to purchase updated routers, switches and wireless access points, allowing the consortium to apply for discounts of up to 90% through FCC's E-rate program.

We know that digital equity has the potential to better the lives of Washingtonians across the lifespan and in every corner of the state. Digital equity is necessary for re-entry of older adults into the workforce post pandemic; reaching the elderly with telemedicine and virtual case management so they can age at home; reaching eligible but unenrolled Washingtonians with key public benefits; serving refugees and immigrants seeking a job; helping returning citizens reintegrate into the community after incarceration; and meeting the educational needs of K-12 and post-secondary students.

Thank you for considering our recommendations in development of your proposed supplemental budget. We look forward to working with you in shaping a fair and visionary broadband future for Washingtonians of all ages and incomes both to address short term and long term needs of our state.

The moment is now, to create internet for all.

Sincerely,

Washington Digital Equity Partners

Rep. Davina Duerr, 1st Legislative District	Sandy Hanks, Government Agency
Sen. Derek Stanford, 1st Legislative District	Brandy DeLange, Government Relations Advocate, Association of Washington Cities
Rep. Strom Peterson, 21st Legislative District	James Peyton, Highline College Education Association
Rep. Beth Doglio, 22nd Legislative District	Julie Morris, InterConnection
Rep. Drew Hansen, 23rd Legislative District	Mohammed Akmoosh, Iraqi Community Center of Washington
Sen. Yasmin Trudeau, 27th Legislative District	Stephanie Ung, Khmer Community of Seattle King County
Rep. Mari Leavitt, 28th Legislative District	Kristen Hoffman, Librarian, Seattle Pacific University
Rep. Melanie Morgan, 29th Legislative District	Amanda Six, Libraries of Stevens County

Rep. Kristine M. Reeves, 30th Legislative District	Shira Rosen, Literacy Source
Sen. Claire Wilson, 30th Legislative District	Michelle Papineau, Live in Kent, Work at Sound Generations
Rep. Jamila Taylor, 30th Legislative District	Esther Jang, Local Connectivity Lab, University of Washington
Rep. Cindy Ryu, 32nd Legislative District	Julian Saint Clair, Loyola Marymount University, Renaissance 21, Northwest African American Museum
Rep. Mia Gregerson, 33rd Legislative District	Sabrina Roach, Make Digital Equity
Rep. Joe Fitzgibbon, 34th Legislative District	Cindy Altick Aden, Master of Library & Information Science Program Chair, Teaching Faculty, Information School, University of Washington
Rep. Liz Berry, 36th Legislative District	Bernal Baca, Mi Centro
Rep. Julia Reed, 36th Legislative District	Valeria Tovar Mendez, Mi Centro
Sen. Rebecca Saldaña, 37th Legislative District	Ginger Kwan, Non-Profit Leader - Open Doors
Rep. Chipalo Street, 37th Legislative District	Katrina Tuggle, Office of Equity
Rep. Mary Fosse, 38th Legislative District	Camisha Ndalama, Partner
Rep. Debra Lekanoff, 40th Legislative District	Minh Duc Nguyen, Partner agencies
Sen. Patty Kuderer, 48th Legislative District	Nilu Jenks, Political Director, FairVote Washington
Cathy MacCaul, Advocacy Director, AARP	Daryl Campbell, President and CEO, Evergreen Goodwill
Bernal C. Baca, American Federation of Teachers, Mi Centro non-profit organization, Racial Equity Team	Lori Forte Harnick, President and CEO, Goodwill of the Olympics & Rainier Region
Emma Slager, Assistant Professor, University of Washington Tacoma School of Urban Studies	Michael Hatzenbeler, President and CEO, PROVAIL

Ernie Rasmussen, Bigfoot
Telecommunications of the Colville Tribes

Shaun Glaze, Black Brilliance Research

Vicky Tamaru, Board Member, buildJUSTLY

Angela Griffin, Byrd Barr Place

Steve LeMay, Chief Empowerment Officer -
Social Change Platforms

Joanne Donohue, Chief Operations Officer,
Sound Generations

Kenzie Youngmark, CIRC

Carl Cole, City Manager, City of SeaTac

Jayson Nyasulu , Community Member,
underserved minority Black communities in
Washington State, Malawian Community.

Fernando Mejia-Ledesma, Communities for
Our Colleges

Vedrana Durakovic, Community Engagement
Officer, Sound Generations

Emily Billow, Community Member

Mandira Virmani, Computing for All (Sector
Intermediary for IT & Cybersecurity, CCW)

Angela Ngiangi Diansasila, Congolese
Integration Network

Floribert Mubalama, Congolese Integration
Network, CIN

T'wina Nobles, President and CEO, Tacoma
Urban League

Michelle Merriweather, President and CEO,
Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle

Sheley Secrest, President, NAACP State
Area Conference (WA, AK, OR)

Morgan Hostettler, Programs and
Partnerships Manager, InterConnection

Vandana Slatter, Representative at
Washington State House of Representatives

Marlando Sparks, Restoration Community
Impact

Matthew Andrew Tighe, Retired military

Laurie Dolan, Retired Washington State
Representative and K-12 Educator

Christopher Webb, Seattle Central College -
IT/BTM Faculty/Black Brilliance Research -
Internet Access/Digital Equity Team Lead

Tracy Flynn, Self

Amy Lee Derenthal, Senior Center of West
Seattle

Jack Jannack, Senior Center of West
Seattle

Jennifer Whip, Senior Center of West
Seattle

Martin Piccoli, Senior Center of West Seattle

Hira Singh Bhullar, Sikh community of
Washington

Jerrel Jones, CREDIT REVOLUTION
EDUCATION DIRECTORS-LLC & Black
Prisoner Caucus Community Group

Elizabeth Stroshane, Small Business Owner
and Parent of K-12 student

Dustin Loup, Digital Equity Advocate

Sara Jonesy, State Librarian, Washington
State Library

Johnathan Feuerstein, Digital Equity
Coordinator, Sound Generations

Amita Lonial, Tacoma Public Library

Amy Cadwell, Digital Equity nonprofit

Meredith Wenger, The Big-Brained
Superheroes Club

Malia Razzaia, Dress for Success Seattle

Femi Adebayo, The Community Technology
Advisory Board (CTAB)

Gabriela Quintana, Economic Opportunity
Institute

Kristina Darnell, The Seattle Public Library

Nancy Newby, Employee

Gladis Clemente, Villa Comunitaria

Sharone Navas, Equity in Education Coalition

Kristine Maree Williams, WA State
Department of Social and Health Services

Hamdi Abdulle, Executive Director, African
Community Housing and Development
(ACHD)

Andrea Newman, Washington state
educator

Munira Mohamed, Executive Director, East
African Community Services

Angela Steck, Washington State PTA

Tsegaye Gebru, Executive Director, Horn of
Africa services

Paula Sardinias, WBBA/FMSGs /T-Mobile
External Affairs (DC)

Roni Holder-Diefenbach, Executive Director,
Okanogan County Economic Alliance

Chaitra Vedullapalli, Women in Cloud

Dirk van Velzen, Executive Director, The
Prison Scholar Fund

Marisol Tapia Hopper, Workforce
Development Council of Seattle King County

Kristopher Larsen, Filipino Community of
Seattle

Avi Laudon, Workforce Development
Council of Seattle-King County (WDC)

Agnes Navarro, Filipino Community of Seattle

Greg Dronkert, Zero Emission Vehicle
Cooperative

Paula Sardinas, FMS Global Strategies, LLC

Deborah Grassi Baker

Aaron Czyzewski, Food Lifeline

Emily Pinckney

Debbie Lacy, Founder/Executive Director,
Eastside For All

Rona Zevin

Rabbi Elazar Bogomilsky, Friendship Circle of
Washington

Rosario-Maria Medina

Sari Feinberg Weiss, Friendship Circle of
Washington

Stacey Wedlake

George Griffin, G3 & Associates

Yoelin Connor