



Legislation Text

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**CITY OF SEATTLE**

**RESOLUTION \_\_\_\_\_**

A RESOLUTION establishing the City Council's goal to implement Internet for All Seattle, a vision of enabling all Seattle residents to access and adopt broadband internet service that is reliable and affordable.

WHEREAS, The City of Seattle (City) and multiple local internet service providers offer various options for residents and non-profit organizations throughout the city such as library access, mobile hotspots, Comcast's Internet Essentials program, but the COVID-19 pandemic revealed the reality of inequitable and detrimental gaps in internet access, adoption, and affordability throughout Seattle; and

WHEREAS, the City has been pursuing strategies to expand access and adoption to broadband internet, including the founding in 1997 of the Technology Matching Fund, the 2011 Great Student Initiative, and the 2016 Digital Equity Initiative; and

WHEREAS, the City's 2018 Technology Access and Adoption Study reported that, while the number of Seattle households reporting access to the internet where they live has increased by ten percent since 2014, people living in low-income and populations who are insecurely-housed are nevertheless five to seven times more likely to lack adequate access to the internet than the average Seattle resident; and

WHEREAS, the 2018 Technology Access and Adoption Study also showed that older residents, those with disabilities, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) residents, and those for whom English is not their primary language are less likely to have access to the internet compared with other groups, and 23 percent of residents reported barriers that limit their internet use, such as lack of affordability and slow or unreliable service; and

WHEREAS, lack of access to the internet and barriers to adoption of internet service were highlighted and

exacerbated by temporary closures to combat the spread of COVID-19, including Governor Jay Inslee’s emergency order on March 13, 2020 closing all K-12 schools in Washington and Mayor Jenny Durkan’s emergency order on March 12, 2020 temporarily closing libraries and community centers; and

WHEREAS, inequities in internet access and affordability and adoption can lead to disparate outcomes during a crisis, such as reduced access to relief programs for individuals and small neighborhood businesses and barriers preventing students from participating in remote learning; and

WHEREAS, advocacy group API Chaya authored an open letter to the City of Seattle and King County in April 2020 “WIFI is a Lifeline, Free WIFI for All” explaining connectivity can serve as a social safety net for those least able to afford broadband services and a public amenity providing increased access to the internet without using cellular data plans; and

WHEREAS, in response to the COVID-19 related school closures and remote learning alternatives put in place, Seattle Public Schools (SPS), in collaboration with Attuned Education Partners, invited all families, educators, school leaders, and central office staff to participate in stakeholder surveys intended to inform future improvements to the district’s capacity to support continuous remote learning in May 2020; and

WHEREAS, SPS survey results from May 2020 found “Roughly 99% of family and caregiver respondents reported that their student has a reliable tablet, laptop, or computer” but with “37% reporting that the device is shared with someone else in the household” and that “educators cited the need for stronger methods to deliver lessons virtually, [and] improved technology tools”; and

WHEREAS, May 2020 SPS data demonstrated that, for the PreK-5 grade levels, educators reported “Students lack internet access” as among their top three barriers to student learning; and

WHEREAS, in the May 2020 SPS survey, 61% of family and caregiver respondents are “concerned” (36%) or “extremely concerned” (25%)” about their student learning and those reporting the highest levels of concern about learning were respondents who identified as American Indian and Native Hawaiian or

other Pacific Islander and respondents with students on Individualized Education Plans (IEPs); and WHEREAS, these recent findings from the May 2020 SPS survey echo, in part, three key barriers to internet adoption in the Federal Communication Commission’s National Broadband Plan: 1) the cost of broadband access for low-income households, 2) the lack of an affordable computing device in the home, and 3) the absence of digital literacy; and

WHEREAS, the King County 2020 Broadband Access Study released in July 2020 affirms that, “for communities to be vibrant, we must remove barriers preventing residents from full and equitable digital engagement, leverage community partners to expand internet capacity and computer literacy, and increase infrastructure options with public/private partners”; and

WHEREAS, the King County 2020 Broadband Access Study found a correlation between lack of income and lack of internet access and, while 96 percent of county residents report accessing the internet from their households, only 80 percent of low-income households do; and

WHEREAS, thousands of youth striving to become the next generation of workers need affordable internet access to advance their education, access to information, technical training, and job opportunities; and

WHEREAS, during the COVID-19 “Stay Home, Stay Healthy” order, people have needed to rely on an internet connection for telemedicine and healthcare provided online, and Seattle's infrastructure must facilitate a future when a higher amount of medical care is done remotely, including examining private/public partnerships with service providers; and

WHEREAS, those without shelter lack access to the internet and have barriers to adequate medical care.

According to the 2018-2019 King County Community Health Needs Assessment, “people of color and low-income residents are at disproportionate risk of being uninsured and having poor health and social outcomes;” and

WHEREAS, the Seattle Public Library closed to the public on March 13, 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, shutting down in-person access to programs such as the Library Equal Access Program

(LEAP)'s which coordinates accessible Library services, materials, programs and provides resources such as the technology lab in the Central Library; and

WHEREAS, due to COVID-19 limitations, adult basic education programs such as Literacy Source, serving more than 1,000 adult learners in Seattle and King County, who partner with other organizations such as the Seattle Public Library, Asian Counseling and Referral Service (ACRS), and Neighborhood House to provide English language translation, computer skills, workforce readiness, and GED classes to adult learners have had to provide all classes remotely, which has required increased internet access and adoption; and

WHEREAS, there are additional barriers beyond a lack of technology skills for many adult students, including not having adequate technology or internet access at home; and

WHEREAS, nonprofits and direct service providers for survivors of gender-based violence such as API Chaya have found that clients rely on Google Translate for critical resources and need the internet to connect with family and other support networks; and

WHEREAS, organizations such as the National Digital Inclusion Alliance have recommended culturally competent "Digital Navigators" or similar support workers, to assist with technology skills/literacy who can work with communities where they are; and

WHEREAS, the City Council wants to substantially increase internet access and adoption in order to prevent a repeat of the problems experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic and to maximize economic opportunities for its residents and local businesses; and

WHEREAS, increased internet access and adoption will enable more workers to telecommute, which will benefit the environment by reducing harmful carbon emissions and assist the City in meeting its goals to address climate change; and

WHEREAS, assumptions about financial risk, competitive challenges, and partnership opportunities associated

with increasing internet access and adoption warrant review; and

WHEREAS, consumer advocates report up to 90% of the cost of building out broadband infrastructure can be saved by following “dig-once” policies ensuring fiberoptic conduit is included whenever the City is undergoing construction in the public right-of-way or utility space; and

WHEREAS, the City has broad authority to decide the circumstances under which it will provide internet service providers, telecommunication companies, and other private organizations access to streets, utility poles, rights of way, and other means to provide services to Seattle residents and businesses; and

WHEREAS, several cities across the United States including, but not limited to, Tacoma, Anacortes, Cedar Falls, Iowa and Chattanooga, Tennessee, have attempted to implement municipal broadband and other dramatic increases in internet access and adoption with variable success due to various constraints and can therefore provide lessons for Seattle; and

WHEREAS, Seattle is a global center of technology and innovation with a local economy that relies on internet connectivity and has a vested interest in making affordable and universal internet access and adoption a fundamental part of Seattle’s infrastructure; and

WHEREAS, Seattle residents regularly report that they are unsatisfied with the quality, price, and customer service provided by the incumbent telecommunications companies, according to a 2018 American Customer Satisfaction Index survey; and

WHEREAS, the City believes it is vital to equitably expand affordable and reliable access to broadband internet service to all its residents in a sustainable manner; NOW, THEREFORE,

**BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF SEATTLE, THE MAYOR  
CONCURRING, THAT:**

Section 1. The City Council commits to the goal of enabling all Seattle residents to access and adopt broadband internet service that is reliable and affordable, which can be called Internet for All Seattle.

Section 2. The City Council recognizes that inequitable internet service and disparate outcomes during

the COVID-19 emergency have been caused by, among other challenges, a lack of affordability, technical assistance, and other barriers to adoption as well as slow or failed internet connections and other shortcomings of reliability.

Section 3. The City Council requests that the Seattle Information Technology Department provide to the Transportation and Utilities Committee the reports and plans necessary to implement Internet for All Seattle including, but not limited to, the following:

A. Gap analysis: A succinct gap analysis that lists the no-cost and low-cost programs already available in The City of Seattle, while quantifying the actual gaps in affordable internet access and adoption for Seattle residents, updated with available data regarding the 2020 experience of students in Seattle Public Schools and City of Seattle’s “Dig Once” policy and its implementation.

B. Lessons learned: A brief study of lessons learned from cities that have dramatically expanded access and adoption of reliable and affordable broadband internet.

C. Action plan: An Internet for All Seattle Action Plan (Action Plan) detailing the recommended steps The City of Seattle can take to help to ensure in an expedited manner universal access to and adoption of affordable broadband internet service for all residents of Seattle, including but not limited to:

1. Partnerships: The strategic partnerships needed to implement the Action Plan, including the business community, philanthropic organizations, Seattle Public Schools, state and local nonprofits and academia, and City boards and departments including but not limited to the Community Technology Advisory Board, Seattle Information Technology, Seattle City Light, Seattle Public Utilities, the Seattle Department of Transportation, Office of Economic Development, Department of Education and Early Learning, Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs, Seattle Parks and Recreation, and the Seattle Public Library.

2. Infrastructure: The infrastructure that must be built or acquired to enable universal access throughout Seattle, which could include a combination of public and private systems. This includes having equitable, “shovel-ready” plans to take advantage of federal and state funding opportunities to expand

infrastructure, including but not limited to, municipal infrastructure for increasing internet access.

3. Resources: A budget estimating the public and private resources required to implement the Action Plan efficiently (including start-up capital costs and ongoing operating costs), which may include experienced consultants to assist the Seattle Information Technology Department.

4. Timeline: An ambitious, yet achievable, schedule for implementing the Action Plan including, but not limited to, a Race and Social Justice analysis to ensure an equitable distribution and increase of affordable access and adoption as well as key milestones to track progress that will be reported to the Council and to the general public.

5. Evaluations: A plan to implement both a near-term process evaluation to ensure effective implementation of Internet for All Seattle, and a long-term outcomes evaluation to assess the effectiveness of Internet for All Seattle once implemented.

a. The process evaluation should provide suggestions for improvements so that corrective action can be taken to maximize the opportunities for successful implementation.

b. The outcome evaluation should describe lessons learned that can be made available to other cities so that Internet for All can benefit other parts of the State of Washington and the nation.

Section 4. Seattle's Information Technology Department is requested to provide its first report to the City Council Transportation & Utilities Committee by September 16, 2020 on existing and proposed short-term solutions to increase internet access and adoption equitably, and a timeline for presenting subsequent reports to the Committee for the longer term, sustainable solutions of the Action Plan.

Adopted by the City Council the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2020, and signed by  
me in open session in authentication of its adoption this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2020.

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President \_\_\_\_\_ of the City Council

The Mayor concurred the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2020.

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Jenny A. Durkan, Mayor

Filed by me this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2020.

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Monica Martinez Simmons, City Clerk

(Seal)