



# County of San Mateo

## Inter-Departmental Correspondence

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**Department:** BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
**DISTRICT 4**  
**File #:** 21-213

Board Meeting Date: 3/23/2021

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**Special Notice / Hearing:** None  
**Vote Required:** Majority

**To:** Honorable Board of Supervisors

**From:** Supervisor Don Horsley, District 3  
Supervisor Warren Slocum, District 4

**Subject:** Resolution to support a Digital Bill of Rights that will increase digital equity for all residents in San Mateo County

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

Adopt a resolution to support a Digital Bill of Rights that will increase digital equity for all residents in San Mateo County.

### **BACKGROUND:**

In March 2020, the COVID-19 global pandemic caused both state and local shelter-in-place to begin and schools to resort to distance-learning for their students. The pandemic highlighted and intensified a problem for our most vulnerable communities - that internet access was not available to all and that the digital divide was real and pervasive. These deserts of affordable and reliable connectivity threaten quality of life and education, creating two classes of citizens - the haves and the have-nots - on opposite sides of a digital divide.

### **DISCUSSION:**

Although San Mateo County has taken steps to alleviate the digital divide, it still stands that we as a County cannot allow residents to have spotty internet access in an age when good internet accessibility is as ubiquitous, for most, as postal service and electricity.

The lack of reasonably priced and dependable internet access - the kind of high-speed access that allows students to connect to their remote classrooms and citizens to connect in a safe way to their family members or to telehealth - should be of top priority for state legislators.

According to an American Civil Liberties Union report "The Public Internet Option," 72% of white households have access to broadband, compared to 54% of African American households and 50% Hispanic households. Only 54% of households with incomes below \$20,000 have home internet compared with 90% of households with above \$100,000.

In California, the California Emerging Technology Fund (CETF) in partnership with the University of California, Berkeley Institute of Governmental Studies (IGS) study “Internet Connectivity and the ‘Digital Divide’ in California - 2019” found that 12% or one in eight homes still do not have access to high speed internet due to both geographic and economic reasons. Furthermore, an estimated 1 million students in California were lacking either computer or internet access in 2020 during the pandemic.

Here in San Mateo County, the “2020 COVID-19 Needs Assessment Survey” conducted by the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities at Stanford University found an estimated 15-30% of students in Redwood City lack internet access and 20-40% lack a home computer.

The Digital Bill of Rights is intended to close the digital divide and increase digital equity to all residents. It is critical for civic participation, employment, education, health, access to essential services and an overall better quality of life.

This Board of Supervisors, and the County of San Mateo, should support the Digital Bill of Rights that will increase equity for all residents in San Mateo County, with the following components:

1. Broadband should be reliable - Broadband should be fast and reliable for households;
2. Digital literacy and education - Educational opportunities should be provided to seniors and those of low-income households for all residents to have an equal opportunity to succeed;
3. Access to a reliable computer or tablet - All residents should have access to, either through rental or ownership, a computer or tablet free of cost for school purposes, job browsing, housing opportunities, submitting applications, as well as access to telehealth and government resources;
4. Affordable Broadband - Broadband that is priced based on income level not on the internet speed;
5. Public WIFI - Access to public WIFI for all residents in the County of San Mateo regardless of income or geographic location;
6. Broadband and Public WIFI that supports small businesses;
7. Broadband and Public WIFI that encourages government participation;
8. Access to tech support during emergencies such as a pandemic;
9. Public Housing providers to offer free broadband or resources on internet options to residents;
10. Access to telemedicine/telehealth - all residents should have the option of telehealth regardless of status; and
11. Set aside County funding to address the broadband and Public WIFI needs of San Mateo County residents.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

Adopting the proposed resolution has no direct financial impact.