

MAR 05 2021

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

REQUESTING THE LEGISLATIVE REFERENCE BUREAU TO CONDUCT A STUDY
ON WAYS TO CLOSE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE.

1 WHEREAS, a broadband connection and digital literacy are
2 increasingly critical to how individuals participate in the
3 society, economy, and civic institutions of all levels of
4 government, including access to health care and essential
5 services, education, and career building; and
6

7 WHEREAS, digital exclusion carries a high societal and
8 economic cost; materially harms the opportunities for
9 individuals with respect to economic success, educational
10 achievement, positive health outcomes, social inclusion, and
11 civic engagement; and exacerbates existing wealth and income
12 gaps, especially those experienced by underrepresented
13 populations; and
14

15 WHEREAS, factors attributing to the digital divide include
16 but are not limited to widening levels of education, household
17 income, geographical restrictions, and the lack of physical
18 access to technology; and
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20 WHEREAS, the lack of digital equity has been a pressing
21 issue for years, disenfranchising those in rural communities and
22 in socioeconomically disadvantaged circumstances, and by
23 creating a digital divide through racial, economic, and
24 geographical boundaries, amplified among the most vulnerable and
25 underserved populations; and
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27 WHEREAS, fifty-five thousand households in Hawaii do not
28 have an internet subscription, roughly 9.5 percent of households
29 have no internet access, seven percent of households have no
30 computer, 19.2 percent of households with an annual income of
31 less than \$75,000 have no internet subscription, 8.7 percent of
32 Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islanders are without an
33 internet subscription, 11.6 percent of individuals sixty-five



1 years and older have no computer in their household, and 10.1
2 percent of individuals with the educational attainment of less
3 than a high school diploma or equivalent have no internet
4 subscription; and
5

6 WHEREAS, the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic
7 reiterated the digital divide by highlighting disadvantages
8 posed to those without internet access, especially through the
9 transition to remote work, virtual learning, and telehealth
10 underscoring the importance of ensuring statewide access to
11 affordable internet; and
12

13 WHEREAS, the drastic increase in Hawaii's unemployment rate
14 has forced some families to cut home internet subscriptions to
15 prioritize other expenses and the need for social distancing has
16 forced most business and societal functions to occur online,
17 placing employment and other necessities out of reach for those
18 without digital connectivity; and
19

20 WHEREAS, the digital divide in the COVID-19 pandemic has
21 contributed to further segregation of individuals in society
22 based on ethnicity, age, race, and gender since technology
23 creates new alignments among individuals with access to the
24 internet compared to those without access. The digital divide
25 is particularly striking with regard to education, workforce
26 development, economic development, and healthcare; and
27

28 WHEREAS, achieving digital equity for all residents of the
29 State requires additional and sustained investment and research
30 efforts; and
31

32 WHEREAS, digital equity supports Hawaii's economic recovery
33 and efforts to accomplish many of the United Nations'
34 Sustainable Development Goals, the Hawaii Community Foundation's
35 CHANGE Framework goals, and the State's Aloha+ Challenge goals;
36 and
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38 WHEREAS, technological discrimination is a poverty and
39 social exclusion, depriving some citizens of essential resources
40 for development and wealth generation. Thus, achieving digital
41 equity is a matter of social and economic justice; now,
42 therefore,



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2 BE IT RESOLVED by the Senate of the Thirty-first
3 Legislature of the State of Hawaii, Regular Session of 2021, the
4 House of Representatives concurring, that the Legislative
5 Reference Bureau is requested to conduct a study on ways to
6 close the digital divide through multidimensional policies and
7 programs that seek to reduce social and digital inequity
8 simultaneously, including but not limited to:

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- 10 (1) Tax policies that reduce the upfront costs of devices
11 and communications technology purchased by the
12 Department of Education to provide students with
13 equitable access to distance learning;
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 - 15 (2) Infrastructure investments and robust competition
16 policies to ensure widespread access to affordable
17 high-quality internet on all islands;
 - 18
 - 19 (3) Policies to ensure that dramatic growth in continued
20 wireless broadband continues and create and distribute
21 digital technology;
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 - 23 (4) Investment in digital literacy, education, and
24 training programs, to remove computer literacy
25 barriers that impede universal access; including
26 policies promoting affordability, readiness, and
27 relevance of access to broadband internet that remove
28 barriers to unserved and underserved populations; and
 - 29
 - 30 (5) Grant programs to support digital equity projects
31 undertaken by individuals, groups, coalitions, or
32 communities of interest; and
 - 33

34 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Legislative Reference
35 Bureau is requested to submit a report of its findings and
36 recommendations to the Legislature no later than twenty days
37 prior to the convening of the Regular Session of 2022; and
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1 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a certified copy of this
2 Concurrent Resolution be transmitted to the Director of the
3 Legislative Reference Bureau.
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OFFERED BY:



