

MAR 05 2021

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# SENATE 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  
19

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  
26

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  
34 years and older have no computer in their household, and 10.1  
35 percent of individuals with the educational attainment of less



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1 than a high school diploma or equivalent have no internet  
2 subscription; and

3  
4 WHEREAS, the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic  
5 reiterated the digital divide by highlighting disadvantages  
6 posed to those without internet access, especially through the  
7 transition to remote work, virtual learning, and telehealth  
8 underscoring the importance of ensuring statewide access to  
9 affordable internet; and

10  
11 WHEREAS, the drastic increase in Hawaii's unemployment rate  
12 has forced some families to cut home internet subscriptions to  
13 prioritize other expenses and the need for social distancing has  
14 forced most business and societal functions to occur online,  
15 placing employment and other necessities out of reach for those  
16 without digital connectivity; and

17  
18 WHEREAS, the digital divide in the COVID-19 pandemic has  
19 contributed to further segregation of individuals in society  
20 based on ethnicity, age, race, and gender since technology  
21 creates new alignments among individuals with access to the  
22 internet compared to those without access. The digital divide  
23 is particularly striking with regard to education, workforce  
24 development, economic development, and healthcare; and

25  
26 WHEREAS, achieving digital equity for all residents of the  
27 State requires additional and sustained investment and research  
28 efforts; and

29  
30 WHEREAS, digital equity supports Hawaii's economic recovery  
31 and efforts to accomplish many of the United Nations'  
32 Sustainable Development Goals, the Hawaii Community Foundation's  
33 CHANGE Framework goals, and the State's Aloha+ Challenge goals;  
34 and

35  
36 WHEREAS, technological discrimination is a poverty and  
37 social exclusion, depriving some citizens of essential resources  
38 for development and wealth generation. Thus, achieving digital  
39 equity is a matter of social and economic justice; now,  
40 therefore,

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

- 8  
9 (1) Tax policies that reduce the upfront costs of devices  
10 and communications technology purchased by the  
11 Department of Education to provide students with  
12 equitable access to distance learning;  
13
- 14 (2) Infrastructure investments and robust competition  
15 policies to ensure widespread access to affordable  
16 high-quality internet on all islands;  
17
- 18 (3) Policies to ensure that dramatic growth in continued  
19 wireless broadband continues and create and distribute  
20 digital technology;  
21
- 22 (4) Investment in digital literacy, education, and  
23 training programs, to remove computer literacy  
24 barriers that impede universal access; including  
25 policies promoting affordability, readiness, and  
26 relevance of access to broadband internet that remove  
27 barriers to unserved and underserved populations; and  
28
- 29 (5) Grant programs to support digital equity projects  
30 undertaken by individuals, groups, coalitions, or  
31 communities of interest; and  
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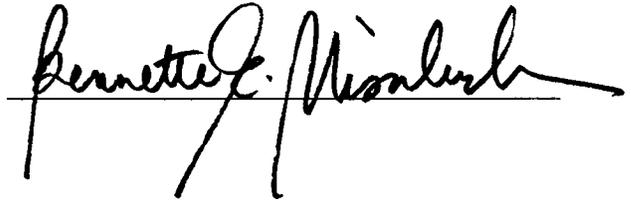
33 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Legislative Reference  
34 Bureau is requested to submit a report of its findings and  
35 recommendations to the Legislature no later than twenty days  
36 prior to the convening of the Regular Session of 2022; and  
37  
38



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1 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a certified copy of this  
2 Resolution be transmitted to the Director of the Legislative  
3 Reference Bureau.  
4  
5  
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OFFERED BY:

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Bennette J. Nisander", is written over a horizontal line. The signature is cursive and extends to the right of the line.