Testimony
State Senate Committee on Reimagining Massachusetts Post-Pandemic Resiliency
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Senator Hinds, members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to share with this forward thinking group.

I'm Angla Siefer, Executive Director of the National Digital Inclusion Alliance. I'm joining you today from Columbus, Ohio. NDIA is a unified voice for affordable home broadband access and personal devices plus local technology training and digital navigation programs. NDIA is a community of digital inclusion practitioners and advocates. We work collaboratively to craft, identify and disseminate financial and operational resources for digital inclusion programs while serving as a bridge to policymakers and the general public.

NDIA represents over 550 affiliated organizations in 44 states, the District of Columbia and the U.S. Virgin Islands. NDIA's positions are based in our affiliates' on-the-ground experience and our own research.

30% of Massachusetts households with incomes less than $35K do not have broadband subscriptions of any kind - including mobile. Comparatively, 3% of Massachusetts households with incomes over $75K do not have a broadband connection of any kind. 21% of Massachusetts households do not have a DSL, cable or fiber broadband subscription in their home. Of those 566,000 households, 93% are in urban areas.[1] That is not an availability issue. The digital divide is a poverty issue.

This is not a unique problem for Massachusetts. Anywhere in the U.S., the lower a household's income, the less likely they are to have broadband service, a device beyond a mobile phone and the digital skills to fully use this incredible tool.

Making sure we have broadband infrastructure widely available is not enough. We must address the barriers to broadband adoption - the cost of broadband service and the cost of a device, plus access to digital literacy training, digital navigation and tech support.

The pandemic drew attention to digital inequities and it resulted in incredible efforts to begin to address the cost of broadband service and devices along with the necessity of digital literacy

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[1] Source: 2019 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Tables B28002 and B28004
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training, digital navigation and tech support. I encourage the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to financially support the following -

- Sponsored agreements between internet service providers and the community entities that hold the contracts.
- Gap networks - neighborhood size wireless networks built to address affordability.
- Outreach and sign up support for the federal Emergency Broadband Benefit and when that offer ends, for discount plans.
- Computer refurbishment to develop a pipeline of low-cost computers for home placement.
- Technical support for devices.
- Development of regional digital equity coalitions.
- Digital navigation service provided by local trusted institutions and organizations.
- Digital literacy training provided by local trusted institutions and organizations.

Your immediate opportunity is to use funds from the American Rescue Plan to address digital inequities as the State of Maryland announced yesterday.[2] But I encourage you to not stop there. If we are to achieve digital equity such that Massachusetts communities are digitally resilient, the systems behind the digital inclusion services must be strengthened.

Every Massachusetts community must have a robust digital inclusion ecosystem with free and low-cost home broadband options, free and low-cost computers, accessible digital literacy training, digital navigation and technical support. System level changes will not happen immediately. This is why creation of digital equity coalitions is essential. The coalitions are a space for local community members to develop a shared understanding of digital inequity, local digital inclusion assets, and to creatively develop solutions, together.

Technology will keep changing. Systems change is essential if we are to come close to digital resiliency.

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[2] https://technical.ly/baltimore/2021/04/01/maryland-covid19-broadband-funding/