
**Innovation, Community & Economic
Development, & Veterans Committee**

HB 2313

Brief Description: Furthering digital equity and opportunity in Washington.

Sponsors: Representatives Gregerson, Ryu, Reed, Ortiz-Self, Morgan, Davis, Ormsby, Bergquist, Simmons, Street, Pollet, Shavers and Doglio.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Expands the purpose and duties of the Statewide Broadband Office (SBO) regarding digital equity, including requiring the SBO to monitor implementation of the Digital Equity Plan.
- Establishes that the Digital Equity Forum is not required to advise the SBO regarding certain digital equity grant programs.
- Makes changes to the purpose and application selection criteria of the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction's technology grant program.

Hearing Date: 1/23/24

Staff: Emily Poole (786-7106).

Background:

Statewide Broadband Office.

The Statewide Broadband Office (SBO) is the central broadband planning body for the state, and as such, it is tasked with promoting deployment of broadband infrastructure and greater broadband access. Among other duties, the SBO is required to coordinate an outreach effort to hard-to-reach communities and low-income communities across the state to provide information

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about broadband programs available to consumers.

The SBO is tasked with updating the state's broadband goals and definitions for broadband service as technology advances, except that the state's definition for broadband service may not be actual speeds less than 25 megabits per second download and three megabits per second upload.

Digital Equity Forum.

The Digital Equity Forum (Forum) develops recommendations to advance digital connectivity and advises the SBO on the Digital Equity Opportunity Program and the Digital Equity Planning Grant Program. In developing its recommendations, among other requirements, the Forum must develop goals that are consistent with the SBO's broadband goals and strengthen public-private partnerships. The SBO and the Washington State Office of Equity (Office of Equity) are jointly responsible for transmitting the Forum's recommendations to the Legislature by October 28, 2025, and every odd-numbered year thereafter. The SBO and the Office of Equity are responsible for appointing members of the Forum. A majority of the participating members must appoint an administrative chair for the Forum.

Digital Equity Plan.

The SBO, in consultation with the Forum and certain agencies, must develop a state Digital Equity Plan (Plan). In developing the Plan, the SBO must identify measurable objectives for documenting and promoting digital equity among underserved communities.

The SBO was required to submit a report by December 1, 2023, to the Governor and the Legislature including a description of how the SBO collaborated with key stakeholders to develop the Plan and recommendations to help improve broadband adoption.

Digital Equity Grant Programs.

The Digital Equity Planning Grant Program, established by the Department of Commerce (Department), provides grants to local governments, institutions of higher education, or other entities to fund the development of a digital equity plan for a discrete geographic region of the state.

The purpose of the Digital Equity Opportunity Program (Program), also administered by the Department, is to advance broadband adoption and digital equity throughout the state. In implementing the Program, the Department must provide organizational support to digital equity programs and provide grants to community technology programs to advance digital equity and inclusion.

The Forum must review grant applications for both grant programs and provide input to the Department regarding the prioritization of applications.

Technology Grant Program.

The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) administers a technology grant

program for Digital Equity and Inclusion Grants to advance the following objectives:

- attaining a universal 1:1 student to learning device ratio;
- expanding technical support and training of school and district staff in using technology to support student learning; and
- developing district-based and school-based capacity to assist students and their families in using technology to support student learning.

When selecting applicants, the OSPI must prioritize applicants based on certain criteria, including the applicant's pre-existing programs, the number of students eligible for reduced-price meals, and the number of students with specialized technology needs.

Summary of Bill:

SBO Duties.

The purpose of the SBO is expanded to include developing and improving broadband adoption and digital equity within the state. Outreach efforts coordinated by the SBO to hard-to-reach and low-income communities must include providing information about digital equity programs and assisting consumers in enrolling in broadband and digital equity programs.

In carrying out its purpose, the SBO must collaborate with federally recognized tribes and all relevant state agencies, including, but not limited to, the Office of Equity, the OSPI, and the Consolidated Technology Services Agency.

The state's definition for broadband service may not be actual speeds less than 100 megabits per second download and 20 megabits per second upload.

Digital Equity Forum.

The purposes of the Forum include developing recommendations to advance broadband adoption and digital equity in Washington. The Forum is not required to advise the SBO on the Digital Equity Opportunity Program and the Digital Equity Planning Grant Program.

A majority of the members of the Forum may appoint an administrative chair or cochairs.

Digital Equity Plan.

The SBO, in consultation with the Forum and certain agencies, must develop and monitor implementation of the Plan. The SBO must make publicly available, on an ongoing basis, an overview of progress made in promoting digital equity among underserved communities, according to the measurable objectives identified in the Plan. The overview must include a description of the successes and remaining challenges of promoting digital equity among specific types of underserved populations.

Technology Grant Program.

The objectives of the OSPI's Digital Equity and Inclusion Grants include maintaining, as well as attaining, a universal 1:1 student to learning device ratio.

When ranking and selecting applicants, the OSPI is not required to prioritize applicants based on their pre-existing programs, the percentage of students eligible for free and reduced-price meals, or the number of students with specialized technology needs.

Definitions.

Definitions for certain terms, including "community anchor institution" and "low-income," are added or modified.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 22, 2024.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.