
**Technology, Economic Development, &
Veterans Committee**

HB 2365

Brief Description: Advancing digital opportunities for all.

Sponsors: Representatives Gregerson, Ryu, Berry, Obras, Zahn, Scott, Ormsby, Macri, Parshley and Pollet.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Expands the purpose of the Statewide Broadband Office (SBO) to include promoting digital equity and requires the SBO to implement and report on a state Digital Equity Plan.
- Modifies the purpose of the Digital Equity Forum (Forum) to include developing recommendations related to digital equity and makes certain changes to the Forum's administrative processes.
- Removes certain duties of the Washington State Office of Equity relating to the Forum and the SBO's outreach efforts.
- Modifies the purposes of, and application requirements for, the Digital Equity Opportunity Program.

Hearing Date: 1/20/26

Staff: Emily Poole (786-7106).

Background:

Statewide Broadband Office.

The Statewide Broadband Office (SBO) is the central broadband planning body for the state, and

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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 and low-income communities across the state to provide information about available broadband programs, and the outreach effort must be reviewed by the Washington State Office of Equity (Office of Equity) annually. The SBO is tasked with updating the state's broadband goals and definitions for broadband service, except that the state's definition for broadband service may not be actual speeds less than 25 megabits per second (mbps) download and 3 mbps upload. In carrying out its purpose, the SBO may collaborate with relevant state agencies.

Washington State Office of Equity.

The Office of Equity serves the purpose of promoting access to equitable opportunities and resources that reduce disparities and improve outcomes statewide across state government.

Digital Equity Forum.

The Digital Equity Forum (Forum) develops recommendations to advance digital connectivity and advises the SBO on Department of Commerce (Department) digital equity grant programs. 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 Office of Equity are responsible for appointing members of the Forum, providing staff support for the Forum, and transmitting the Forum's recommendations to the Legislature. In making appointments, the SBO and the Office of Equity must prioritize certain types of appointees. A majority of the participating members must appoint an administrative chair for the Forum. Members of the Forum serve without compensation, but may be reimbursed for travel expenses.

Digital Equity Plan.

The SBO, in consultation with the Forum and certain agencies, is required to develop a state Digital Equity Plan (Plan). In developing the Plan, the SBO is required to identify measurable objectives for documenting and promoting digital equity among underserved communities. The SBO was required to submit a report by December 1, 2023, including a description of how the SBO collaborated with key stakeholders to develop the Plan and recommendations to improve broadband adoption.

Digital Equity Opportunity Program.

The purpose of the Digital Equity Opportunity Program, administered by the Department, is to advance broadband adoption and digital equity. In implementing the Digital Equity Opportunity 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 and provide input to the Department regarding the prioritization of applications. In awarding grants, the Department must consider the Forum's input and also consider the extent to which grants would increase the number of students gaining access to greater levels of digital inclusion.

Summary of Bill:

SBO Duties.

The purpose of the SBO is expanded to include promoting broadband adoption and digital equity. The SBO must coordinate with relevant state agencies and community anchor institutions, in addition to other entities, when developing strategies to promote broadband access, and the SBO must develop strategies to promote broadband adoption.

In setting broadband goals and definitions for broadband service, the state's definition for broadband may not be speeds less than 100 mbps download and 20 mbps upload.

As part of the SBO's outreach efforts, the SBO must request that broadband providers report cost information for retail service, and the SBO must include such information in outreach materials. The outreach effort must be reviewed annually by the Forum, instead of by the Office of Equity.

In carrying out its purpose, the SBO must consider collaborating with tribes and all relevant state agencies.

Plan Implementation.

The SBO is required to coordinate implementation of the Plan in consultation with relevant state agencies. The SBO must submit a report to the Governor and the Legislature by January 1, 2027, and every two years thereafter, including an updated version of the Plan and an evaluation of how the SBO is implementing the Plan.

Digital Equity Forum Duties and Membership.

The purpose of the Forum is modified to include developing recommendations related to broadband adoption and digital equity. In addition to existing requirements, when the Forum is developing recommendations, the Forum must also:

- strengthen cooperatives and other partnerships that promote digital connectivity, broadband adoption, and digital equity, instead of just public-private partnerships;
- increase awareness of digital equity needs and resources;
- work to increase collaboration with tribal governments and other partners;
- recommend opportunities for sustainable digital equity funding;
- consider related issues within its scope brought forward by the public or members of the Forum;
- consult with the SBO and other agencies on the Plan;
- annually review the SBO's outreach effort; and
- provide feedback on digital equity grant programs.

The Office of Equity is not required to appoint members of the Forum, provide staffing for the Forum, or transmit the Forum's recommendations to the Legislature. Instead, the SBO must consult with the Office of Equity, as well as the chair or co-chairs of the Forum, on Forum appointments.

The SBO must prioritize appointees representing local agencies, in addition to other priority appointees, and the SBO must also consider appointees representing broadband providers, the technology industry, philanthropy, the health industry, and the legal and justice system. A majority of Forum members may appoint an administrative chair or co-chairs, and members of the Forum may receive a stipend.

Digital Opportunity Program.

The Digital Equity Opportunity Program is renamed as the Digital Opportunity Program (Program). The Program must provide grants to digital equity programs, instead of community technology programs.

In implementing the Program, to the extent that funds are appropriated, the SBO must provide support to regional coalitions supporting digital equity, and organizational and capacity building support provided by the SBO must serve the purpose of enabling directories of digital equity program services, community needs assessments, and tracking of lower-cost broadband offerings.

Program applicants must provide certain evidence of local partnership. In awarding grants, the SBO must consider whether the grant furthers the goals of the Plan, opportunities to leverage additional investments, the requirements and intent associated with federal or private funds, and the geographic distribution of students that may benefit from the Program.

The Forum is not required to review grant applications and provide input, but the SBO must share certain Program materials with the Forum on a timely basis and consider the Forum's input.

Definitions.

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

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 13, 2026.

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