
SUBSTITUTE HOUSE BILL 1503

State of Washington

69th Legislature

2025 Regular Session

By House Technology, Economic Development, & Veterans (originally sponsored by Representatives Gregerson, Ryu, Ortiz-Self, Berry, Peterson, Reed, Goodman, Ormsby, Parshley, Macri, Ramel, Hill, and Bergquist)

READ FIRST TIME 02/20/25.

1 AN ACT Relating to furthering digital equity and opportunity in
2 Washington state; amending RCW 43.330.532, 43.330.534, 43.330.536,
3 43.330.539, and 43.330.5395; reenacting and amending RCW 43.330.530;
4 adding new sections to chapter 43.06D RCW; creating a new section;
5 and recodifying RCW 43.330.539 and 43.330.5395.

6 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

7 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** The legislature reaffirms the findings
8 made in section 102, chapter 265, Laws of 2022, in particular the
9 findings that access to the internet is essential to participating in
10 modern day society; the cost of being online continues to be
11 unaffordable for many people in both rural and urban areas; and that,
12 across the state, there is a lack of affordable plans, barriers to
13 enrolling in appropriate broadband plans, and barriers to fully
14 utilizing the opportunities that broadband offers.

15 The legislature further reaffirms its intent to broaden access to
16 the internet, the appropriate devices, and the skills to operate
17 online safely and effectively so that all people in Washington can
18 fully participate in our society, democracy, and economy by expanding
19 assistance and support programs offered in the state.

20 To support the state's efforts in providing access to the
21 internet and the skills to effectively and safely utilize it, the

1 legislature intends to support existing cross-agency collaboration,
2 in particular between the department of commerce and the office of
3 equity. The legislature intends to facilitate this collaboration, in
4 which the department of commerce has primary responsibility for
5 increasing access to broadband and related infrastructure, and the
6 office of equity has primary responsibility for increasing digital
7 equity by facilitating the provision of digital devices and services
8 to individuals and communities in Washington.

9 **Sec. 2.** RCW 43.330.530 and 2022 c 265 s 301 and 2022 c 237 s 2
10 are each reenacted and amended to read as follows:

11 The definitions in this section apply throughout this section and
12 RCW 43.330.532 through 43.330.538, 43.330.412, and 43.330.5393(~~(7—and~~
13 ~~43.330.5395))~~) unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

14 (1) (a) "Advanced telecommunications capability" means, without
15 regard to any transmission media or technology, high-speed, switched,
16 broadband telecommunications capability that enables users to
17 originate and receive high quality voice, data, graphics, and video
18 telecommunications using any technology.

19 (b) "Advanced telecommunications capability" does not include
20 access to a technology that delivers transmission speeds below the
21 minimum download and upload speeds provided in the definition of
22 broadband in this section.

23 (2) "Aging individual" means an individual 55 years of age or
24 older.

25 (3) "Board" means the public works board established in RCW
26 43.155.030.

27 (4) "Broadband" or "broadband service" means any service
28 providing advanced telecommunications capability and internet access
29 with transmission speeds that, at a minimum, provide 100 megabits per
30 second download and 20 megabits per second upload.

31 (5) "Broadband adoption" means the process by which an individual
32 obtains daily access to and the ability to use the internet:

33 (a) At a speed, quality, price, and capacity necessary for the
34 individual to accomplish common tasks, such that the access qualifies
35 as an advanced telecommunications capability;

36 (b) Providing individuals with the digital skills necessary to
37 participate fully and safely online;

38 (c) On a device connected to the internet and other advanced
39 telecommunications services via a secure and convenient network, with

1 associated end-user broadband infrastructure equipment such as wifi
2 mesh router or repeaters to enable the device to adequately use the
3 internet network; and

4 (d) With technical support and digital navigation assistance to
5 enable continuity of service and equipment use and utilization.

6 (6) "Broadband infrastructure" means networks of deployed
7 telecommunications equipment and technologies necessary to provide
8 high-speed internet access and other advanced telecommunications
9 services to end users.

10 (7) "Community anchor institution" means a public school, a
11 public housing authority, a library, a medical or health care
12 provider, a community college or other institution of higher
13 education, a state library agency, or other nonprofit or governmental
14 community support organization for the purposes of broadband
15 connectivity or facilitating use of broadband service by underserved
16 populations.

17 (8) "Department" means the department of commerce.

18 ((+8)) (9) "Digital equity" means the condition in which
19 individuals and communities in Washington have the information
20 technology capacity that is needed for full participation in society,
21 democracy, and the economy.

22 ((+9)) (10)(a) "Digital inclusion" means the activities that are
23 necessary to ensure that all individuals in Washington have access
24 to, and the use of, affordable information and communication
25 technologies including, but not limited to:

26 (i) Reliable broadband internet service;

27 (ii) Internet-enabled devices that meet the needs of the user;

28 and

29 (iii) Applications and online content designed to enable and
30 encourage self-sufficiency, participation, and collaboration.

31 (b) "Digital inclusion" also includes obtaining access to digital
32 literacy training, the provision of quality technical support, and
33 obtaining basic awareness of measures to ensure online privacy and
34 cybersecurity.

35 ((+10)) (11) "Digital literacy" means the skills associated with
36 using technology to enable users to use information and
37 communications technologies to find, evaluate, organize, create, and
38 communicate information.

39 ((+11)) (12) "Last mile infrastructure" means broadband
40 infrastructure that serves as the final connection from a broadband

1 service provider's network to the end-use customer's on-premises
2 telecommunications equipment.

3 ~~((12))~~ (13) "Local government" includes cities, towns,
4 counties, municipal corporations, public port districts, public
5 utility districts, quasi-municipal corporations, special purpose
6 districts, and multiparty entities comprised of public entity
7 members.

8 ~~((13))~~ (14) "Low-income" means households ~~((as defined by the~~
9 ~~department of social and health services, provided that the~~
10 ~~definition may not exceed the higher of 80 percent of area median~~
11 ~~household income or))~~ with a household income that does not exceed
12 200 percent of the federal poverty level or that does not exceed the
13 self-sufficiency standard as determined by the University of
14 Washington's self-sufficiency calculator.

15 ~~((14))~~ (15) "Middle mile infrastructure" means broadband
16 infrastructure that links a broadband service provider's core network
17 infrastructure to last mile infrastructure.

18 ~~((15))~~ (16) "Office" means the governor's statewide broadband
19 office established in RCW 43.330.532.

20 ~~((16))~~ (17) "Tribe" means any federally recognized Indian tribe
21 whose traditional lands and territories included parts of Washington.

22 ~~((17))~~ (18) "Underserved population" means any of the
23 following:

- 24 (a) Individuals who live in low-income households;
- 25 (b) Aging individuals;
- 26 (c) Incarcerated individuals;
- 27 (d) Veterans;
- 28 (e) Individuals with disabilities;
- 29 (f) Individuals with a language barrier, including individuals
30 ~~((who are))~~ with limited English ~~((learners))~~ proficiency or who have
31 low levels of literacy;
- 32 (g) Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority
33 group;
- 34 (h) Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area;
- 35 (i) ~~((Children and youth))~~ Dependents in foster care; or
- 36 (j) Individuals experiencing housing instability.

37 ~~((18))~~ (19) "Unserved areas" means areas of Washington in which
38 households and businesses lack access to adequate, reliable, and
39 affordable broadband service, as defined by the office.

1 **Sec. 3.** RCW 43.330.532 and 2022 c 265 s 302 are each amended to
2 read as follows:

3 (1) The governor's statewide broadband office is established. The
4 director of the office must be appointed by the governor. The office
5 may employ staff necessary to carry out the office's duties as
6 prescribed by chapter 365, Laws of 2019, subject to the availability
7 of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose.

8 (2) The purpose of the office is to encourage, foster, develop,
9 and improve affordable, quality broadband, broadband adoption, and
10 digital equity within the state in order to:

11 (a) Drive job creation, promote innovation, improve economic
12 vitality, and expand markets for Washington businesses;

13 (b) Serve the ongoing and growing needs of Washington's education
14 systems, health care systems, public safety systems, transportation
15 systems, industries and business, governmental operations, and
16 citizens; and

17 (c) Improve broadband accessibility and adoption for unserved and
18 underserved communities and populations.

19 **Sec. 4.** RCW 43.330.534 and 2024 c 54 s 53 are each amended to
20 read as follows:

21 (1) The office has the power and duty to:

22 (a) Serve as the central broadband planning body for the state of
23 Washington;

24 (b) Coordinate with relevant state agencies, local governments,
25 tribes, public and private entities, public housing agencies,
26 community anchor institutions, nonprofit organizations, and consumer-
27 owned and investor-owned utilities to develop strategies and plans
28 promoting deployment of broadband infrastructure and greater
29 broadband access and broadband adoption, while protecting proprietary
30 information;

31 (c) Review existing broadband initiatives, policies, and public
32 and private investments;

33 (d) Develop, recommend, and implement a statewide plan to
34 encourage cost-effective broadband access and to make recommendations
35 for increased usage, particularly in rural and other unserved areas;

36 (e) Update the state's broadband goals and definitions for
37 broadband service in unserved areas as technology advances, except
38 that the state's definition for broadband service may not be actual

1 speeds less than (~~twenty-five~~) 100 megabits per second download and
2 (~~three~~) 20 megabits per second upload; and

3 (f) Encourage public-private partnerships to increase deployment
4 and adoption of broadband services and applications.

5 (2) When developing plans or strategies for broadband deployment,
6 the office must consider:

7 (a) Partnerships between communities, tribes, nonprofit
8 organizations, local governments, consumer-owned and investor-owned
9 utilities, and public and private entities;

10 (b) Funding opportunities that provide for the coordination of
11 public, private, state, and federal funds for the purposes of making
12 broadband infrastructure or broadband services available to rural and
13 unserved areas of the state;

14 (c) Barriers to the deployment, adoption, and utilization of
15 broadband service, including affordability of service and project
16 coordination logistics; and

17 (d) Requiring minimum broadband service of (~~twenty-five~~) 100
18 megabits per second download and (~~three~~) 20 megabits per second
19 upload speed, that is scalable to faster service.

20 (3) The office may assist applicants for the grant and loan
21 program created in RCW 43.155.160, the digital equity opportunity
22 program created in RCW 43.330.412, and the digital equity planning
23 grant program created in RCW 43.330.5393 with seeking federal funding
24 or matching grants and other grant opportunities for deploying or
25 increasing adoption of broadband services.

26 (4) The office may take all appropriate steps to seek and apply
27 for federal funds for which the office is eligible, and other grants,
28 and accept donations, and must deposit these funds in the statewide
29 broadband account created in RCW 43.155.165.

30 (~~(5) (The office shall coordinate an outreach effort to hard-to-~~
31 ~~reach communities and low-income communities across the state to~~
32 ~~provide information about broadband programs available to consumers~~
33 ~~of these communities. The outreach effort must include, but is not~~
34 ~~limited to, providing information to applicable communities about the~~
35 ~~federal lifeline program and other low-income broadband benefit~~
36 ~~programs. The outreach effort must be reviewed by the office of~~
37 ~~equity annually. The office may contract with other public or private~~
38 ~~entities to conduct outreach to communities as provided under this~~
39 ~~subsection.~~

1 ~~(6))~~) In carrying out its purpose, the office (~~may~~) must
2 collaborate with federally recognized tribes and all relevant state
3 agencies including the utilities and transportation commission,
4 Washington technology solutions, the department of commerce, the
5 community economic revitalization board, the department of
6 transportation, the public works board, the state librarian, (~~and~~
7 ~~all other relevant state agencies~~) the Washington state office of
8 equity, and the office of the superintendent of public instruction.
9 As a part of this collaboration, the office must provide data to the
10 Washington state office of equity regarding broadband adoption and
11 digital equity programs maintained by the office to assist the
12 Washington state office of equity in monitoring the implementation of
13 a state digital equity plan in accordance with RCW 43.330.539 (as
14 recodified by this act).

15 **Sec. 5.** RCW 43.330.536 and 2019 c 365 s 5 are each amended to
16 read as follows:

17 It is a goal of the state of Washington that:

18 (1) By 2024, all Washington businesses and residences have access
19 to high-speed broadband that provides minimum download speeds of at
20 least twenty-five megabits per second and minimum upload speeds of at
21 least three megabits per second;

22 (2) By 2026, all Washington communities have access to at least
23 one gigabit per second symmetrical broadband service at anchor
24 institutions like schools, hospitals, libraries, and government
25 buildings; (~~and~~)

26 (3) By 2028, all Washington businesses and residences have access
27 to at least one provider of broadband with download speeds of at
28 least one hundred fifty megabits per second and upload speeds of at
29 least one hundred fifty megabits per second; and

30 (4) By 2028, broadband goals for the state of Washington are
31 reviewed and updated with input provided by entities, such as the
32 digital equity forum, communities, tribes, nonprofit organizations,
33 local governments, consumer-owned and investor-owned utilities,
34 relevant state agencies, and public and private entities.

35 **Sec. 6.** RCW 43.330.539 and 2022 c 265 s 201 are each amended to
36 read as follows:

37 (1) The office is primarily responsible, in coordination with the
38 state broadband office, for encouraging, fostering, developing, and

1 improving digital equity by facilitating the provision of digital
2 devices and services to individuals and communities in Washington.

3 (2) The office shall coordinate with the statewide broadband
4 office and the department of commerce for an outreach effort to
5 unserved and underserved communities and populations across the state
6 to provide information about broadband and digital equity programs
7 available to consumers of these communities and assist consumers in
8 enrolling in these programs. The outreach effort must include, but is
9 not limited to, providing information to applicable communities about
10 the federal lifeline program and other low-income broadband benefit
11 programs, and must facilitate relationship-building and the
12 communication of lived experience to amplify local efforts and
13 identify continuing needs. The office shall review the outreach
14 effort annually. The office shall coordinate with state boards and
15 commissions that support the participation of people from
16 underrepresented populations in policy-making processes, and may
17 otherwise coordinate or contract with other public or private
18 entities, including to conduct outreach to communities and assist
19 consumers in program enrollment as provided under this subsection.

20 (3) The office, in consultation with the digital equity forum,
21 the utilities and transportation commission, ~~((and))~~ the statewide
22 broadband office, the department of social and health services, and
23 other relevant state agencies, must develop and monitor
24 implementation of a state digital equity plan.

25 ~~((The office must seek any available federal funding for~~
26 ~~purposes of developing and implementing the state digital equity~~
27 ~~plan))~~ The development of the state digital equity plan must build
28 upon the progress made by the statewide broadband office in
29 developing a state digital equity plan.

30 (b) The state digital equity plan must include such elements as
31 the office determines are necessary to leverage federal funding.

32 ~~((2))~~ (4) In developing the plan, the office must identify
33 measurable objectives for documenting and promoting digital equity
34 among underserved communities located in the state.

35 ~~((3))~~ (5)(a) By December 1, ~~((2023))~~ 2026, the office must
36 submit a report to the governor and the appropriate committees of the
37 legislature, including the following:

38 ~~((a))~~ (i) The digital equity plan described in subsection
39 ~~((1))~~ (3) of this section and measurable objectives described in
40 subsection ~~((2))~~ (4) of this section;

1 ~~((b))~~ (ii) A description of how the office collaborated with
2 the membership of the digital equity forum, state agencies, and key
3 ~~((stakeholders))~~ partners to develop the plan including, but not
4 limited to, the following:

5 ~~((i))~~ (A) Community anchor institutions;

6 ~~((ii))~~ (B) Local governments;

7 ~~((iii))~~ (C) Local educational agencies;

8 ~~((iv))~~ (D) Entities that carry out workforce development
9 programs; and

10 ~~((v))~~ (E) Broadband service providers;

11 ~~((e))~~ (iii) A description of federal funding available to
12 advance digital equity in the state~~(, including any available~~
13 ~~information on the extent to which state residents have enrolled in~~
14 ~~the affordable connectivity program through an approved provider; and~~
15 ~~(d))~~;

16 (iv) An evaluation of existing state digital equity initiatives,
17 policies, programs, funding needs, and public and private
18 investments, including a recommended model for future infrastructure
19 and outreach investments; and

20 (v) Recommendations of additional state law or policy that can be
21 targeted to help improve broadband adoption and affordability for
22 state residents. This may include recommendations of ongoing
23 subsidies that the state can provide to low-income individuals and
24 community anchor institutions, as well as identification of revenue
25 sources that other states or jurisdictions have developed to fund
26 such subsidies or discounted rates.

27 ~~((4) For the purpose of this section, "office" means the~~
28 ~~statewide broadband office established in RCW 43.330.532))~~ (b) The
29 office shall review, update, and submit to the governor and the
30 appropriate committees of the legislature a revised state digital
31 equity plan every two years after its initial publication. The office
32 shall submit to the governor and the appropriate committees of the
33 legislature an updated report that includes the topics in (a)(i)
34 through (v) of this subsection and subsection (6) of this section the
35 year following its submission of a revised state digital equity plan.

36 (6) The office must make publicly available, on an ongoing basis,
37 an overview of the progress made in promoting digital equity among
38 underserved communities located in the state, according to the
39 measurable objectives identified in the digital equity plan. The
40 overview must include a description of the successes and remaining

1 challenges of promoting digital equity among specific types of
2 underserved populations. As part of this requirement, the office
3 shall have oversight over and direct future improvements as it
4 determines is necessary, to the public data resources maintained by
5 the statewide broadband office to track digital equity and the
6 digital divide.

7 **Sec. 7.** RCW 43.330.5395 and 2022 c 265 s 306 are each amended to
8 read as follows:

9 (1) The Washington digital equity forum is established for the
10 purpose of developing recommendations to advance digital
11 connectivity, broadband adoption, and digital equity in Washington
12 state (~~and advising the statewide broadband office on the digital~~
13 ~~equity opportunity program as provided under RCW 43.330.412 and the~~
14 ~~digital equity planning grant program as provided under RCW~~
15 ~~43.330.5393)).~~

16 (2) In developing its recommendations to advance digital
17 connectivity, broadband adoption, and digital equity, the forum must:

18 (a) Develop goals that are consistent with the goals of the
19 governor's statewide broadband office, as provided in RCW 43.330.536,
20 and the office, as provided in RCW 43.06D.020;

21 (b) Strengthen public-private partnerships, cooperatives, and
22 other partnerships that promote digital connectivity, broadband
23 adoption, and digital equity;

24 (c) Solicit public input through public hearings or informational
25 sessions;

26 (d) Work to increase collaboration and communication between
27 local, state, and federal governments and agencies; and

28 (e) Recommend opportunities for sustainable digital equity
29 funding, including reforms to current universal service mechanisms.

30 (3) The directors of the governor's statewide broadband office
31 and the (~~Washington state~~) office (~~of equity~~) are responsible for
32 appointing participating members of the digital equity forum and no
33 appointment may be made unless each director concurs in the
34 appointment. In making appointments, the directors must prioritize
35 appointees representing:

36 (a) Federally recognized tribes;

37 (b) State and local agencies involved in digital equity; and

38 (c) Underserved and unserved communities, including historically
39 disadvantaged communities.

1 (4) A majority of the (~~participating~~) members appointed by the
2 directors (~~must~~) may appoint an administrative chair or cochairs
3 for the forum.

4 (5) In addition to members appointed by the directors, four
5 legislators may serve on the digital equity forum in an ex officio
6 capacity. Legislative participants must be appointed as follows:

7 (a) The speaker of the house of representatives must appoint one
8 member from each of the two largest caucuses of the house of
9 representatives; and

10 (b) The president of the senate must appoint one member from each
11 of the two largest caucuses of the senate.

12 (6) (~~(a)~~) Funds appropriated to the forum may be used to
13 compensate, for any work done in connection with the forum,
14 additional persons who have lived experience navigating barriers to
15 digital connectivity and digital equity.

16 (~~(b) Each member of the digital equity forum shall serve without~~
17 ~~compensation but may be reimbursed for travel expenses as authorized~~
18 ~~in RCW 43.03.050 and 43.03.060.~~)

19 (7) Staff for the digital equity forum must be provided by (~~the~~
20 ~~governor's statewide broadband office and~~) the (~~Washington state~~)
21 office (~~of equity~~). The (~~governor's statewide broadband office and~~
22 ~~the Washington state~~) office (~~of equity are jointly~~) is
23 responsible for transmitting the recommendations of the digital
24 equity forum to the legislature, consistent with RCW 43.01.036, by
25 October 28, 2025, and every odd-numbered year thereafter.

26 NEW SECTION. Sec. 8. A new section is added to chapter 43.06D
27 RCW to read as follows:

28 The definitions in this section apply to RCW 43.330.539 (as
29 recodified by this act) and 43.330.5395 (as recodified by this act)
30 unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

31 (1) "Broadband," "broadband service," and "broadband adoption"
32 have the meanings defined in RCW 43.330.530.

33 (2) "Community anchor institution" has the meaning defined in RCW
34 43.330.530.

35 (3) "Digital equity" has the meaning defined in RCW 43.330.530.

36 (4) "Local government" has the meaning defined in RCW 43.330.530.

37 (5) "Low-income" has the meaning defined in RCW 43.330.530.

38 (6) "Office" means the Washington state office of equity.

1 (7) "Underserved population" has the meaning defined in RCW
2 43.330.530.

3 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 9.** RCW 43.330.539 and 43.330.5395 are each
4 recodified as sections in chapter 43.06D RCW.

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