

March 18, 2021

Dear Governor Abbott, Lieutenant Governor Patrick, Speaker Phelan, and legislators,

The COVID-19 pandemic has put a spotlight on the state's broadband and digital connectivity challenges. It forced millions of Texans to rely on their internet connection for pediatric visits, virtual school, workforce training, job interviews, court hearings, mental health services, and more. In some cases, supports for children, families, and individuals were strengthened by the expansion of online services. However, individuals who did not already have broadband access, digital skills, or access to digital devices were left behind.

As we know, Texas is one of only six states with no state broadband plan. We appreciate Governor Abbott and state leaders making the creation of a broadband office and plan a priority this legislative session. We also applaud current efforts by the Texas legislature to address the infrastructure gap that has prevented many communities from accessing broadband internet. These efforts are important as part of a comprehensive effort to close the digital divide. In addition, we encourage state leaders to consider addressing issues such as digital access and readiness, which disproportionately impact vulnerable communities, as efforts to close the digital divide are pursued.

**This session, we call on state leaders to go beyond infrastructure and ensure legislation addresses digital access, adoption, and readiness.**

Digital access and readiness encompass a broad set of technology, infrastructure, skill building, and cost measures that ensure comprehensive and equitable access to the digital world. Unfortunately, many Texans - especially low-income and people of color - face significant barriers. Almost one million Texans currently do not have broadband access and only 68% of households who have access pay for service. With 1.4 million Texans citing lack of digital literacy as their primary barrier to digital connectivity, we appreciate that the Governor's Broadband Development Council released a report recommending digital literacy training as a critical component to addressing the digital divide.

The pandemic has accelerated this transition to online systems, and state policies and practices must adapt. **To bridge the digital divide and ensure that all Texans have the necessary tools to navigate a digital world, we urge lawmakers to:**

- Invest in digital connectivity strategies, including literacy, training, and access to devices to help spur increased access to existing broadband networks for the most vulnerable populations: seniors, people with disabilities, English learners, families with low incomes, and Black and Latino families.
- Authorize the State Broadband Council and Broadband Development Office to research digital connectivity strategies, identify barriers to adoption and use, analyze how statewide access to broadband benefits workforce development, and engage in community outreach on affordability and use of broadband and connectivity strategies.
- Ensure the state broadband plan and program's scope addresses the affordability and use of broadband services and technologies, including providing community grants.
- Strengthen telehealth by ensuring Medicaid, Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), and Texas Department of Insurance-regulated health plans continue to cover and

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reimburse telemedicine and telehealth services, including audio-only telephone services where clinically appropriate.

- Expand virtual access to prevention, early intervention, and support services for parents and children.

Thank you for your consideration of these recommendations.

Sincerely,

Texans Care for Children  
United Ways of Texas  
Digital Texas  
Texas 2036  
Greater Houston Partnership  
Texas Rural Funders  
Texas Library Association  
Texas Black Caucus Foundation  
Texas Association of Community Health Centers  
Intel Corporation  
IDRA (Intercultural Development Research Association)  
Town of Shady Shores  
Camp Fire First Texas  
First3Years  
Easterseals Central Texas  
National Association of Social Workers – Texas Chapter  
Texas Association of Goodwills  
Methodist Healthcare Ministries of South Texas, Inc.  
Digital Inclusion Alliance of San Antonio  
Network of Behavioral Health Providers  
Texas Counseling Association  
SonShine Outreach Center  
Texas Pediatric Society  
Clarity Child Guidance Center  
Upbring  
National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Texas  
Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Brazos Valley  
Texas e-Health Alliance  
Be Well Victoria  
Texas Association for the Education of Young Children  
Asian American Health Coalition-HOPE Clinic  
Goodwill Industries Central Texas

The Meeting Squad  
Family Service Center of Galveston County  
Air Alliance Houston  
Prevention Institute  
Prosumers International  
Reaching Richmond  
Family to Family Network  
Autism Society of Texas  
East End Communities Collaborative  
Tyler Area Chamber of Commerce  
The Grand 1894 Opera House  
City Education Partners  
Variis Arches Navigation Services  
Capland Speech Therapy Center  
Mental Health America of Greater Dallas  
Health For All, Inc  
Guardianship Services, Inc.  
Willie Carter Outreach Center  
Excellence by Design Education Center  
Twin City Mission, Inc  
Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Tarrant County  
Autism Speaks  
Bastrop County Cares  
The Senior Source  
Texas Ramp Project B C/S  
The San Antonio Chamber of Commerce  
Dallas Innovation Alliance  
Tarrant Literacy Coalition  
Any Baby Can  
Galveston County Continuum of Care Council  
Southwestern Diabetic Foundation, Inc.  
Revitalize South Dallas Coalition  
YMCA of Metropolitan Fort Worth  
AIDS Outreach Center  
Zan Wesley Holmes, Jr. Community Outreach Center  
Fort Bend Family Health Center, Inc. dba AccessHealth

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Girls Inc. of Tarrant County  
TexProtects  
Cancer Care Services  
City of San Antonio  
The Education Trust in Texas  
San Antonio ISD  
Southside ISD, San Antonio  
Texas Silver-Haired Legislature  
South San Antonio ISD  
OnRamp  
Center for Transforming Lives  
Edgewood ISD  
Restore Education  
Teach Plus Texas  
East Central ISD  
Young Invincibles  
Pre-K 4 SA  
Brighton Center  
Children's Bereavement Center of South  
Texas  
Rise Recovery  
San Antonio Lifetime Recovery  
San Antonio Sports  
Texas Diaper Bank  
Greater Randolph Area Service Programs  
Children's Defense Fund - Texas  
Lozoya Consulting, LLC  
Guardian House  
Any Baby Can of San Antonio  
Texas Psychological Association  
YMCA of Greater San Antonio  
Family Service Association of San Antonio  
Southwest ISD  
Mission Road Ministries  
Urban Strategies, Inc.  
Catholic Charities  
Roy Maas Youth Alternatives  
Texas Health Resources  
South Dallas Employment Project  
Boys & Girls Clubs of San Antonio  
The Commit Partnership  
Bynum School  
Presa Community Center  
Girl Scouts of Southwest Texas  
Boys and Girls Clubs of the Permian Basin  
AVANCE - San Antonio, Inc.  
American Indians in Texas Spanish Colonial  
Missions  
Meals on Wheels Victoria

Victoria Christian Assistance Ministry  
Boys and Girls Club of DeWitt County  
Communities in Schools of Greater Tarrant  
County  
Vickery Meadow Youth Development  
Foundation  
Madonna Center, Inc.  
ChildSafe  
Clarity Child Guidance Center  
Educate Midland  
The Springboard Center  
The Salvation Army of Midland  
Respite Care of San Antonio  
Girl Scouts of the Desert Southwest  
Centers for Children and Families  
The Arc of San Antonio  
The Children's Shelter  
Good Samaritan Center of San Antonio  
ThriveWell Cancer Foundation  
Lubbock Chamber of Commerce  
Child Advocates San Antonio  
Rohingya Society of Greater Houston  
Alamo Colleges Foundation  
Healy Murphy Center  
The Women's Center of Tarrant County  
Alpha Home  
Brazos Maternal & Child Health Clinic, Inc  
(The Prenatal Clinic)  
Family Pathfinders of Tarrant County, Inc  
Texas Midwest Community Network  
Philanthropy Advocates, a Collaboration  
with Educate Texas  
Texas Network of Youth Services  
Girls Empowerment Network  
Texas Health Resources  
United Way of Williamson County  
Lubbock Area United Way  
United Way of West Ellis County  
United Way of the Greater Fort Hood Area  
United Way of the Crossroads  
United Way of the Coastal Bend  
United Way of the Brazos Valley, Inc.  
United Way of Tarrant County  
United Way of Southern Cameron County  
United Way of San Antonio and Bexar  
County  
United Way of Parker County  
United Way of Odessa  
United Way of Midland

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United Way of Mid & South Jefferson  
County  
United Way of Metropolitan Dallas  
United Way of Lamar County  
United Way of Kaufman County  
United Way of Johnson County, Inc.  
United Way of Grayson County  
United Way of Central Texas  
United Way of Amarillo & Canyon

United Way Galveston County Mainland  
United Way for Greater Austin  
United Way of Greater Houston  
United Way Abilene  
United Way of Hays and Caldwell Counties  
Nacogdoches Area United Way  
Greater Longview United Way