

August 12, 2020

Senator Patty Murray

RE: Digital Equity Now program funding for Yakima

Dear Senator Murray,

Thank you for your continued support of public education in Yakima County and Washington State. As you know, the recent pandemic closure accelerated attention on equity gaps in education. The reality is that even before COVID-19, education faced growing challenges in societal equity gaps for families of underserved groups.

It is critical that all students have equitable online access, as this is no longer a luxury but a necessity. I've found that many local students do not have access to ISP services in the home and many have substandard technology if any at all.

The pandemic has further compounded the issue by forcing many more families to reprioritize their finances and discontinued internet services. Our families need your help to realize digital equity in the COVID-19 era. According to the Pew Research Center, "Nearly one in five teens can't always finish their homework because of the digital divide."

Today, I write encouraging you to bridge the gap between students in the Yakima community by providing funding through the \$125M Digital Equity Now program you spoke with Council about in 2019. Led by yourself, Senate Democrats introduced the Digital Equity Act of 2019 to help close the digital divide impacting communities across the nation. As you are aware, the Digital Equity Act of 2019 creates new federal investments targeted toward a diverse array of projects at the state and local level that promote "digital equity"— a concept defined by the National Digital Inclusion Alliance as the, "condition in which all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy and economy." The Digital Equity Act builds on recent efforts to increase access to broadband by prioritizing "digital inclusion" - activities that seek to provide individuals and communities with the skills, support, and technologies necessary to take full advantage of a broadband internet connection when they have one.

Thank you for your consideration. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or would like additional information.

Sincerely,

Patricia Byers
Mayor