

Digital Equity Foundation Act

Legislation to establish a nonprofit foundation with the aim of improving digital equity, inclusion, and literacy

[S.4865/H.R.8858](#), co-authored by Sens. Lujan (D-NM), Merkley (D-OR), Heinrich (D-NM), Markey (D-MA), Blumenthal (D-CT), Klobuchar (D-MN), and Rep. Matsui (D-CA)

The Digital Equity Foundation Act would establish a nonprofit foundation to leverage public and private investments to close the divide on digital equity, digital inclusion, and digital literacy. The Foundation would supplement the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) work to award grants, support research, provide training and education, engage with stakeholders, collect data, and promote policies to improve digital equity. The Foundation will be run by a diverse group of experts specializing in the field of digital equity, technology, and telecommunications.

Why do we need a Digital Equity Foundation?

The pandemic highlighted that access to both high-speed internet connection and devices is essential to everyday life, and not everyone has that access equally. Our research shows that about 1 in 4 children from lower-income households do not have a computer at home.¹ Disparities in access also occur geographically and racially: students in rural areas (37%) and students of color (26% Latino, 30% Black, 35% Native American) are more likely to lack adequate connectivity than students in urban areas (21%) or white students (18%).²

This has enormous repercussions for communities that do not have the resources and tools they need to get and stay online. It is much more difficult for kids to stay on track at school if they do not have online access at home, as

assignments, textbooks and study materials, tutoring services, and peer-to-peer collaborations have all transitioned to online platforms. In a broader sense, people who are unconnected have a much harder time applying for jobs, schools, or homes, accessing telemedicine services, or gaining technological skills for future employment.

A Digital Equity Foundation would address the digital divide at this community level, ensuring that the people who need help the most are first prioritized. Other congressionally-established nonprofit foundations, such as the National Institutes of Health and the United States Food and Drug Administration, have had much success in supporting the missions of federal agencies and provide a vehicle to maximize public-private partnerships. The Digital Equity Foundation would achieve similar goals.

Additional endorsing organizations include:

Public Knowledge, Open Technology Institute at New America, The Schools, Health & Libraries Broadband (SHLB) Coalition, National Digital Inclusion Alliance, American Library Association, Center for Rural Strategies, United Church of Christ Media Justice Ministry, Common Cause, National Consumer Law Center, National Hispanic Media Coalition, and NextGen California.

¹ Rideout, V.J. & Robb, M.B. (2021). [The Common Sense Census presents: Research brief. Remote learning and digital equity during the pandemic](#). San Francisco, CA: Common Sense.

² Chandra, S., Chang, A., Day, L., Fazlullah, A., Liu, J., McBride, L., Mudalige, T., Weiss, D., (2020). [Closing the K-12 Digital Divide in the Age of Distance Learning](#). San Francisco, CA: Common Sense Media. Boston, Massachusetts, Boston Consulting Group.

Common Sense is the nation's leading nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the lives of all kids and families by providing the trustworthy information, education, and independent voice they need to thrive in the 21st century.