



July 27, 2021

Joint Committee on Ways & Means

Senator Michael Rodrigues, Chair

Massachusetts State House, [Room 212] Boston, MA 02133

Representative Aaron Michlewitz, Chair

Massachusetts State House, [Room 243] Boston, MA 02133

Representative Daniel Hunt, House Chair House Committee on Federal Stimulus and Census Oversight

Massachusetts State House, [Room 166] Boston, MA 02133

Dear Committee Members:

Mr. Chairmen, members of the legislature, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Marvin Venay - I'm the Director of Advocacy at Tech Goes Home (TGH), a Boston-based nonprofit working to increase digital equity across Massachusetts.

Tech Goes Home works with a broad network of partners - schools, businesses, other nonprofits, and community-based organizations - to connect people in need with high-speed internet, digital devices, and - critically - digital skills training. TGH equips individuals to access essential resources online and take advantage of opportunities afforded by the digital world.

Over the past 18 months, COVID-19 has exposed - and deepened - digital inequity. Thousands of individuals and families without access to computers, the internet, or without requisite digital skills struggled to participate in online learning, connect with loved ones, file for unemployment, access vaccines, and more. Digital inequity worsened economic and health disparities, especially in low-income communities and communities of color.

Digital inequity didn't originate during the pandemic, however. Even before COVID-19, nearly one in every five households in Massachusetts lacked access to a computer and/or high-speed internet - not only in rural areas but in Boston and our Gateway Cities as well. Even among those who have access to the internet and devices, critical skills gaps persist.

As the legislature aims to aid in the robust and equitable recovery from COVID-19, it's more important than ever to allocate vital resources to expand digital access and improve digital skills for everyone in Massachusetts. Leveraging federal funds to expand broadband access, provide digital devices, and invest in community-based training programs is essential. Funding as such supports recovery in the short term, and it builds resilience in the face of future crises and prepares every Massachusetts resident for education, employment, healthcare, and other critical systems that have migrated more online - forever changed by the pandemic.

Our Commonwealth has the chance, right now, to help individuals and families get back on their feet by increasing digital access. In an increasingly tech-driven world, digital access is an essential service, not a luxury. We have proven approaches - like Tech Goes Home - that result in better education, employment, and health outcomes and improve participants' quality of life. We urge you to devote a significant amount of federal recovery funds to investing in these proven approaches and making meaningful progress towards eliminating digital inequity in Massachusetts.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today, and I would welcome any questions.

Submitted by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marvin Venay", written in a cursive style.

Marvin Venay

Director of Advocacy of Tech Goes Home