

Digital Navigators Address Digital Equity in Massachusetts

Please Support H.100: An Act Establishing a Commission to Develop a Statewide Credentialing Program for Digital Navigators



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PROBLEM: The Massachusetts State Digital Equity Plan identified affordability as the greatest barrier to residents using the internet.

This problem was made worse in April 2024 when over 368,000 Massachusetts residents lost their affordable Internet subsidy through the federal government, leaving some without Internet at all and others having to choose between other essential household bills and Internet. As a result, an estimated 12 million telehealth visits will be lost per year, including thousands of Medicaid members of MassHealth.

Digital Navigators stepped in as locally-trusted guides to help residents find affordable alternatives and to confidently gain digital skills and devices to access online resources, telehealth, jobs, and education.

SOLUTION: We can support the growth of the vital profession of digital navigation through workforce standards, expanded training, and establishing a statewide credentialing process.

This focused-Commission approach builds upon the successful models of Health Navigators and Community Health Workers, relatively new workforces that evolved in Massachusetts and became central to helping people navigate the complexities of health insurance and health care. The Digital Navigator model is similar, consisting of people who understand their communities and support people to find affordable Internet, and moves Massachusetts towards long-term solutions for digital equity.

A statewide approach to digital navigation is written into the current MA State Digital Equity Plan (MSDEP) and this approach can kickstart interdepartmental conversations and planning to this end.

Digital Navigators Advance Digital Equity by Helping People:

- ▶ Apply for jobs
- ▶ Find housing
- ▶ Take online classes
- ▶ Access healthcare
- ▶ Stay connected with their loved ones and fight isolation
- ▶ Do online banking
- ▶ Navigate public transportation
- ▶ Build confidence and trust in their digital skills
- ▶ Participate fully in civic life and access government information
- ▶ Register children for school

Not Your Usual Commission

This legislation will create a dynamic, focused commission that brings together the needed stakeholders to begin a statewide process in a one-year window of time. It will bring together the relevant state agencies, along with regional and community-based organizations to create the **first-ever statewide credential program in the nation for Digital Navigators**, explore mechanisms for ongoing funding, identify opportunities for training, and inventory effective models already underway in Massachusetts.

H.100 will advance the growing field of digital navigation by establishing a commission to bring together agencies across the state to plan and recommend strategies for a statewide Digital Navigation Credential with the goal of advancing digital equity across Massachusetts.

Definitions

Digital Navigators are tech helpers, social workers, and community health workers who are specially trained to assist in helping community members gain access to devices, high-speed internet, and tech skills to operate effectively in the digital world. Digital navigators are based in libraries, councils on aging, community health centers, and a broad range of community-based organizations across the state.

Digital Equity is a condition in which all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy and economy. Digital Equity is necessary for civic and cultural participation, employment, lifelong learning, and access to essential services.

Who's Impacted

Many communities and populations in Massachusetts, representing millions of people, may be at risk for digital inequity. These include approximately:

2.2M
BIPOC
PEOPLE

1.8M
PEOPLE WHO EARN
LOW INCOMES

1.1M
OLDER
ADULTS

780K
PEOPLE WITH
DISABILITIES

250K
RECENT
IMMIGRANTS

Three Elements of Digital Equity



**AFFORDABLE
HIGHSPEED
INTERNET**



**ACCESS
TO
DEVICES**



**DIGITAL
KNOWLEDGE
AND SKILLS**

Named Members to the Commission

Alliance for Digital Equity

City of Boston

Department of
Public Health

Department of
Transitional Assistance

Executive Office of Health
and Human Services

Executive Office of
Housing and Livable
Communities

Executive Office of
Labor and Workforce
Development

Executive Office of
Technology Services
and Security

Mass. Association of
Community Colleges

Mass. Association
of Community
Health Workers

Mass. Board of Library
Commissioners

Mass. Broadband Institute

Mass. Digital
Navigation Network

Mass. Healthy Aging
Collaboration

Mass. Immigrant &
Refugee Advocacy
Coalition

Mass. League of
Community Health Centers

MassHealth

Metro North
Workforce Board

Office of Elder Affairs

Office on Disability

Vinfen

