

# Promote Digital Equity and Good Jobs Through Broadband Expansion



2023-2024 Legislative Session

*Access to reliable, affordable high-speed internet is vitally important to work, education, and healthcare. Unfortunately, too many North Carolinians lack access to this essential infrastructure. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, signed into law in November 2021, provides states with significant federal funding to help close the digital divide by building broadband networks and providing training and services to help families access affordable internet.<sup>1</sup> We urge our state legislators to use this federal funding to close the digital divide, promote racial and economic equity, and create high-quality union jobs.*

## Essential Connections

### Broadband Is Essential Infrastructure:

- Reliable internet is essential to the economic well-being of North Carolinians—it connects workers with training and skill development opportunities, helps job seekers with finding and applying to jobs, and provides access to educational programs.<sup>2</sup>
- The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of affordable high-speed internet in accessing important social services, telehealth, K-12 educational programs, and remote work opportunities.<sup>3</sup> Internet access also improves health outcomes by fostering social connections and support and facilitating communication with friends and family.<sup>4</sup>

## Close Divides

### Closes the Digital Divide:

- Despite its vital importance, millions of families do not have access to affordable, high-speed wireless services or the education and skills to be able to access those services. This digital divide disproportionately affects lower-income families, families in rural areas, and communities of color.<sup>5</sup>
- Our state must prioritize equitable access to affordable internet to ensure a healthy, diverse, and strong workforce equipped to meet the challenges of the modern economy. To that end, federal infrastructure funding should prioritize digital equity and inclusion by connecting underserved areas, ensuring access to devices, and providing digital skills trainings in those communities.

# Quality Jobs and Networks

## Create Good Union Jobs to Build High-Quality Networks:

- Federal funding should be used to create quality union jobs. We urge our lawmakers to go over and above the labor standard requirements in the federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and prioritize subgrantees that:
  1. Provide fair wages,
  2. Provide quality benefits,
  3. Ensure worker safety,
  4. Provide worker training,
  5. Directly employ their workforce,
  6. Honor workers' civil rights, and
  7. Respect the right of workers to join and form unions.

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### Endnotes:

1. "Fact Sheet: Biden-Harris Administration's 'Internet for All' Initiative: Bringing affordable, reliable high-speed internet to everyone in America," Nat'l Telecoms. and Info. Admin. (May 13, 2022), <https://ntia.gov/other-publication/2022/fact-sheet-biden-harris-administration-s-internet-all-initiative-bringing>.
2. Adie Tomer et al., "Digital Prosperity: How Broadband Can Deliver Health and Equity to All Communities," Brookings Institution, pp. 18-19 (Feb. 2020), [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/20200227\\_BrookingsMetro\\_Digital-Prosperity-Report-final.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/20200227_BrookingsMetro_Digital-Prosperity-Report-final.pdf).
3. Charles Coble, "The Reality of Broadband in North Carolina," EdNC (June 29, 2020), <https://www.ednc.org/perspective-the-reality-of-broadband-in-north-carolina/>; see also "What COVID-19 Underscores about How Broadband Connectivity Affects Educational Attainment," Pew Charitable Trust (Dec. 7, 2020), <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2020/12/08/what-covid-19-underscores-about-how-broadband-connectivity-affects-educational-attainment>.
4. Tomer et al., *supra* note ii at p. 38;
5. Tomer et al., *supra* note ii at p. 4; see also Phela Townsend, "Disconnected: How the Digital Divide Harms Workers and What We Can Do About It," The Century Foundation (Oct. 2, 2020), <https://tcf.org/content/report/disconnected-digital-divide-harms-workers-can/>.