

CLOSE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE! ENSURE INTERNET ACCESS FOR NEW YORKERS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

New York has long been a leader in ensuring that its individuals experiencing homelessness have access to shelter, yet **thousands of residents in temporary housing lack basic internet access**. The consequences of this stark digital divide on the lives of New Yorkers experiencing homelessness is devastating. These individuals and families are unable to search and apply for permanent housing and jobs, participate in remote schooling, apply for government benefits, stay connected to friends and family, access basic entertainment, or obtain necessary medical care.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly exacerbated the barriers resulting from the digital divide, raising the stakes to literally life-or-death. The need to use internet-based applications is vital, as in-person access to everything from city offices and classrooms to real estate listings is accessible almost exclusively online, and such online access is preferred given the continuing public health risks of unnecessary in-person contact. This is also a racial justice issue, as Black and Hispanic New Yorkers are disproportionately represented among those experiencing homelessness and disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.

The City Bar Justice Center (CBJC) has documented this problem in a report "[Homeless Need Internet Access To Find a Home: How Access to Internet and Technology Resources can Support Homeless Families Transition out of Homeless Shelters](#)". This report and its recommendations have been endorsed by a wide range of organizations, including law firms, legal services providers and community groups.

We urge the City and State to make an explicit public commitment and articulate a defined implementation timeline for all City and State-funded homeless shelters (including all properties and temporary housing facilities, such as hotels) to have installed the infrastructure necessary to ensure reliable cell service, as well as broadband and internet access. This should include, at minimum:

- **Reliable Wi-Fi connections for all shelter residents;**
- **Updated Internet-ready computers, tablets, or other devices;**
- **Wireless or Bluetooth printers with scanners, or printers that maintain connections with the shelter's computers, tablets or other word processing devices.**

This must be a sustained commitment and officials should consult with all stakeholders as it devises a plan to provide internet access in shelters.

Shelters are overwhelmingly lacking in one essential service which could reduce the length of residents' stay & facilitate their exit into permanent housing -- access to technology. [#WiFi4Homeless](#)