



NEWS RELEASE
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**Maine Advisory Committee to the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights
Releases Report Calling Digital Equity in Maine an Urgent Civil Rights Issue**

Today, the Maine Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights issued its report, "[Digital Equity as a Civil Right in Maine](#)." The Advisory Committee held a series of public briefings and invited government officials, advocates, scholars, and members of the public to provide testimony about digital equity. The Committee's report makes findings and recommendations on key aspects of digital equity – issues that were brought into sharp focus during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Committee's findings and recommendations include:

Current access to reliable broadband is insufficient in both urban and rural areas. The Committee recommends the state legislature and state agencies determine that broadband is a public utility subject to regulation that would promote equal access.

There is a significant need for devices for immigrants, communities of color, individuals with disabilities, older adults, English language learners, and low-income households.

There is a significant lack of digital literacy training, an essential component of digital equity, in Maine. The committee recommends the state legislature and state agencies allocate federal and state funding to provide professional learning for educators to close the digital divide in education and implement digital skills education at a regional and local level.

"Our most vulnerable communities were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic," said Diane Khiel, chair of the Advisory Committee. "The pandemic exacerbated multiple inequities and Maine's ability to adapt has depended on our connectivity – in the classroom, on the job, through telemedicine, and through our legal system. The pandemic has made clear that digital equity is an emerging and urgent civil rights issue."

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The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, established by the Civil Rights Act of 1957, is the only independent, bipartisan agency charged with advising the President and Congress on civil rights and reporting annually on federal civil rights enforcement. Our 51 state Advisory Committees offer a broad perspective on civil rights concerns at state and local levels. For information about the reports and meetings of the Commission and its Advisory Committees, please visit <http://www.usccr.gov> and follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).