

Dear Arlington County Board Members:

As a longtime Arlington resident and educator, I am appreciative of the County Board's funding a feasibility study for providing free internet access to the residents of two housing units as outlined in Consent Agenda Item #34. The digital divide has been with us forever but if the Covid 19 Pandemic has any silver linings, it has exposed the need for much greater internet accessibility for all members of our community. Urgent action is needed now.

Although Arlington Public Schools has done a fantastic job of trying to ensure that our students have internet access to continue their instruction, connectivity issues persist. Moreover, some of our college students, particularly first-generation students, have more limited access to the internet and I believe that anyone trying to do job search and application completion must be experiencing difficulties because of cost. I wonder too how small businesses in Arlington are managing internet costs with lost revenues due to the pandemic.

I hope then that this feasibility study is the first step in a much more strategic approach to improving broadband access and services in Arlington. When the pandemic is over, and schools and colleges and businesses can finally fully re-open, we don't want to find the digital divide still persists.

Sincerely,

Terry Bratt