

**Office of the Governor**

**JB Pritzker**

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**Governor Pritzker and President Preckwinkle Announce New Statewide Network to Deploy Computer Devices for Low-Income Residents Across the State**

*To Enhance Digital Access for Low-Income Families, Governor Issues Call to Action to Public/Private Sectors to Donate Used Equipment to be Refurbished for Illinois Families*

**Chicago**—Governor JB Pritzker and Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle today announced a first of its kind initiative in Illinois to expand digital access for low-income households throughout the state. Through a unique partnership with PCs for People, a national nonprofit providing refurbished devices, Cook County, and numerous other community partners, the State of Illinois will launch a statewide network to deploy refurbished computers, digital literacy programming and workforce development. The new *Connect Illinois Computer Equity Network* aims to put computers and other mobile devices into the hands of Illinois residents – assisting more families with access to high speed internet that is essential for e-learning, remote work, telehealth, and more.

To further expand digital access across the state, the Governor today issued call to action to public, private and philanthropic sectors to donate used equipment and build on a network already set to deploy at least 20,000 refurbished computers annually for Illinois families. For more information on how to recycle technology or to apply for an upgraded device, please visit Illinois.gov/computerequitynetwork.

“Today I’m announcing a first-of-its-kind statewide initiative to put computers into the hands of those who need them: The Connect Illinois Computer Equity Network. This new collaboration between our Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity and the nonprofit PCs for People will provide refurbished and modernized computers to those in need,” **said Governor Pritzker.** “Today we are kicking this off by providing the first 20,000 devices to families in need all across the state. As we grow the program, it’s businesses and philanthropists that will make this program successful. In the spirit of the holiday season, I’m asking Illinois companies to join us in this effort, to help build on this initial down payment. When your upgrade cycle gets renewed and your old technology no longer fits the needs of your company, you can donate it, and it will be upgraded for use by a family in need.”

 And of course, everyone is invited to donate your outdated computers, too – just

While initial investments by the state and its corporate partners are paving the way to distribute 20,000 devices, the need is much greater, with an estimated 1.1 million households in Illinois without a computer at home, according to US Census data. To help more households currently without internet get the equipment needed for connectivity, the state is calling on Illinois’s public, private and philanthropic partners to make more used computers available for donation. Visit Illinois.gov/computerequitynetwork for donation information as well as information on eligibility to receive a device from this program.

“The pandemic has laid bare the tremendous inequities in our communities, including access to technology and digital accessibility. This is particularly important during a time when residents are dependent on technology for remote work and education,” **said Cook County President Toni Preckwinkle.** “I am grateful for the Governor, my Council of Digital Equity and PCs for People’s partnership in this critical initiative to help narrow the digital divide in Illinois.”

President Preckwinkle’s Council on Digital Equity (CODE) is comprised of local members and senior advisors from around the U.S. who provide expertise and guidance as Cook County takes action to address digital inequities. CODE has a special focus on the County’s south suburbs and other communities that have great need. CODE engages numerous, diverse groups to advance digital inclusivity and equity in the areas of digital infrastructure, digital proficiency and digital well-being.

To keep up with high demand for devices and connectivity, PCs for People and the state of Illinois are urging businesses and individuals either to refurbish or recycle their technology using PCs for People’s zero-landfill approach. The organization provides free certified and secure data wiping, and all computer hard drives. To jumpstart the effort, the Jewish United Fund has provided $250,000 in critical seed funding to initiate the Cook County partnership. The State and its partners have already begun deploying devices through the Metro East location, which launched in September, with support from the Illinois Covid-19 Response Fund.

“The pandemic has shown millions of homes do not have the connectivity needed for education, information and remote work,”**said PCs for People CEO Casey Sorensen. “**We are honored to partner with Governor Pritzker and the State of Illinois, businesses donating technology and an array of community partners to get devices and support to thousands of residents across the state at a time of great need.”

PCs for People will operate the network with close involvement of the Illinois Office of Broadband and various community partners. The statewide network will include two central warehouse locations – one in southern Cook County and the other in the Metro East Region. Each centralized warehouse location will receive, refurbish, and redistribute computers for use by low-income households around the state. While the Metro East hub has been active since September, a new lease agreement with Cook County will allow PCs for People and the state to launch the second warehouse center in January 2021.

"Now more than ever before, basic internet is a necessity in our daily lives, yet more than one million households still don't have access to a computer,”**said Erin Guthrie, Director of the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO).**“As the pandemic has shown, our communities are increasingly dependent on broadband for economic opportunity, e-learning, remote work, telehealth and more. To help close the digital divide facing our communities, DCEO is proud to join Governor Pritzker in launching this first-of-its-kind initiative that will not only deliver computers and digital access, but that will boost the quality of life and expand economic opportunity for all Illinois communities."

“Digital access is a lifeline, not only for students learning remotely, but for all individuals and families,” **said Lonnie Nasatir, President, Jewish United Fund**. “Technology can help lift up underserved communities with equal access to vital tools and information, serving as a catalyst to keep people connected and thriving. In the midst of the COVID-19 crisis, it is especially important to JUF and our Jewish community that we reach out to our neighbors who have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, and for whom access to technology and employment opportunities will be a vital equalizer going forward. That’s why we are proud to join Governor Pritzker and the State of Illinois as founding partners in launching this life changing initiative.”

The Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership (The Partnership) is the umbrella organization operating the largest non-profit workforce development system in the nation, serving the City of Chicago and Cook County.  The Partnership will fund nationally-recognized A+ certification workforce training for at least four cohorts per year of 20-25 individuals learning to repair, refurbish and maintain computers through PCs for People’s innovative social enterprise. Upon completion, participants will be referred for permanent employment with private sector businesses.

“We recognize that digital equity and access are workforce development matters, thus we are pleased to collaborate with PCs for People,” **said Karin M. Norington-Reaves, CEO of The Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership (The Partnership).** “As the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) administrator for Cook County, The Partnership will leverage federal WIOA funding to support this important initiative that will provide critical job training and placement during this very challenging time.”

“This new computer network will serve as an amazing resource for Illinois communities and its residents and students,” **said Ronda Sauget, Executive Director of the Leadership Council of Southwest Illinois.** “The Metro East region has been fortunate to begin work with PCs for People with the launch of community events beginning earlier this year, which has already resulted in hundreds of devices connected for the people in our region who need them most. Thanks to this partnership, our residents, students and communitiesnow have a very low-cost option of having their own computers and uncapped connectivity to the internet. SWIL is proud to partner with the Pritzker administration and PCs for People as they work expand services that will put digital connectivity into the hands of more families in need throughout all of Illinois.”

 The creation of this new statewide network builds on Governor Pritzker’s commitment to digital equity and ensuring that income or status are not determining factors of internet access for any Illinois household. Earlier this month, the administration [announced a new digital equity program](https://www2.illinois.gov/dceo/Media/PressReleases/Pages/PR20201117.aspx), directing over $750,000 in funding for cross-sector collaboration promoting planning and capacity building around broadband access, adoption, and utilization.

These latest investments complement Illinois’ nation-leading broadband expansion plans, Connect Illinois, with over $420 million to be invested to bring universal access to Illinois communities by 2024. The state is accepting applications through March 1, 2021 for its second $50 million round of Connect Illinois funding. For more information on Connect Illinois and opportunities to apply for broadband grant funding, please visit the [Office of Broadband website](https://www2.illinois.gov/dceo/ConnectIllinois/Pages/ILOfficeofBroadband.aspx).

Illinois households without access to a working computer or internet or those seeking to donate are encouraged to visit [PCs for People’s website](http://www.pcsforpeople.com/Illinois) to register and learn more about how they can request a computer. To be eligible, residents must be below 200 percent of the poverty level or enrolled in income-based government assistance program, such as free and reduced school lunch, Medicaid, and SNAP.

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**About PCs for People**PCs for People operates in six states and offers a scalable solution to the problems caused by the digital divide through a multifaceted social enterprise model with widespread community impact. Their operations impact the businesses and organizations that receive secure donated equipment, as well as the individuals hired and trained to connect households in need with technology and support. Since the arrival of COVID-19 in March, PCs for People has served over 84,000 digitally disconnected individuals including 45,000 children.