

Senior Citizens Advisory Council

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July 27, 2021

Dear Chairman Do and Members of the Board,

As the advisory body to the Orange County Board of Supervisors on matters relating to our county's older adults, the Orange County Senior Citizens Advisory Council (SCAC) brings to you an immediate and pressing need of Orange County Senior Citizens; one which has been greatly magnified by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The "**Digital Divide**" experienced by Orange County senior citizens further increases the disparity in access to:

- healthcare information and services
- independent living
- mental stimulation
- socialization with family and friends for mental well-being
- nutritional support and services
- education and reporting of elder abuse

We have identified the following immediate needs, and are providing corresponding solutions for your consideration:

Need #1. – Access to Devices. Under the Connections, Health, Aging and Technology (**CHAT**) project, the California Department of Aging is leveraging Federal CARES Act dollars, to distribute at least 4,000 iPads with data plans and customized onboarding and technical support statewide to older adults in need. Only 300 iPads are slated to come to Orange County. This is not enough to meet the need. We request that the Board of Supervisors approve the purchase of a minimum 2200 additional iPads.

Need #2. – Training. Provide an online subscription, available to all Orange County senior citizens, to **Get Set Up** which is an online class educational site – classes for seniors taught by seniors. Mental stimulation is a proven deterrent to depression, and a delayer of cognitive decline. Class seat rates vary upon number purchased. 42,000 class seats purchased at \$2.35 per class seat is \$98,700 for the first year. We request that 42,000 to 50,000 classes be purchased for Orange County Senior Citizens. **Get Set Up** also provides the possibility for older adults to be employed as instructors.

Need #3. – Connectivity. Create a lasting **Orange County Emergency Broadband Benefit Program**, a replica of the Federal Emergency Broadband Benefit Program, to provide connectivity to Orange County Senior Citizens in need. The Federal program,

SCAC Board

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which is only a six-month program, makes discounts available through the Federal Communications Commission's \$3.2 billion Emergency Broadband Benefit Program. Orange County Senior Citizens need lasting connectivity, not just for six months.

Orange County senior citizens and their health, mental health, access to services, independent living, and quality of life are depending on the Board of Supervisors immediate action in taking these first three steps in bridging the Digital Divide. These actions are consistent with the California Master Plan on Aging.

Please see the attached report for supporting information.

We welcome your input and communication with us as we work together to serve the older adults of Orange County.

Sincerely,

Elaine Gennawey

Elaine Gennawey, Chair
Senior Citizens Advisory Council