



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Kristen Gonzalez

Senator Gonzalez's Bill Requiring Internet Access For Temporary Housing Residents Passes The New York State Senate

KRISTEN GONZALEZ June 9, 2023

| ISSUE: **SENATOR KRISTEN GONZALEZ, SHELTERS, BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE, WIFI ACCESS**

ALBANY, NY - Last night, S4561A, sponsored by Senator Kristen Gonzalez (SD 59-D/WFP) passed the New York State Senate. The legislation requires all temporary housing facilities to provide high-speed internet access to all individuals residing in their facilities.

State Senator Kristen Gonzalez said, "Access to the internet is crucial for unhoused individuals seeking stability and opportunities. Internet access empowers them to search for stable housing options, apply for jobs, and access vital social services online. For students staying in temporary living facilities, access to the internet enables them to do homework and remain engaged with their school community. The goal of shelters should not solely be to provide temporary housing, but also to prevent homelessness and to help residents regain independent living in their communities. WiFi access can help accomplish that. In a world where access to the internet has become increasingly vital, this bill is a significant step towards bridging the digital divide faced by unhoused individuals and homeless youth, and I will continue to push for it until it becomes law."

Bret Parker, Executive Director, New York City Bar Association and Lisa Pearlstein, Director of the Legal Clinic for the Homeless, City Bar Justice Center said, "Homeless shelters are overwhelmingly lacking in an essential service which could reduce the length of residents'

stay and facilitate their exit into permanent housing – reliable internet access. Without reliable internet access, individuals and families experiencing homelessness are unable to search and apply for permanent housing and jobs, participate in remote learning or complete assigned homework, apply for government benefits, stay connected to friends and family, or obtain necessary medical care. The City Bar applauds the Senate for passing Senator Gonzalez’s important legislation that will provide internet access to all individuals residing in temporary housing throughout New York State.”

Covered facilities include all temporary housing, including adult shelters, family shelters, small-capacity shelters, shelters for families with children, domestic violence shelters, runaway and homeless youth shelters, and hotels and motels used as shelters. By requiring these facilities to provide WiFi access, the bill ensures that these vulnerable populations can connect to vital resources, opportunities, and support networks.

Temporary housing facilities will be required to submit their plans for internet access to the Department for Oversight and Approval within one year of the effective date of the bill. In 2019, the City Bar Justice Center conducted a survey of current and former family-shelter residents in Manhattan and the Bronx. Residents said that if the shelter had internet, they would use it for finding permanent housing (70%), finding a job (60%), finding medical care (63%), and accessing other benefits like unemployment, Supplemental Security Income, food stamps and Medicaid (45%).

Costs for the program will be paid for through New York’s ConnectAll program