

# Climate Assessment

## Office of Legislative Oversight

### Expedited

### Bill 4-23:

### Administration – Non-Merit Positions –

### Special Projects Manager

## SUMMARY

The Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) anticipates that Expedited Bill 4-23 could have a minimal positive impact on the County's contribution to addressing climate change as appointing a new position with a focus on increasing digital equity could have a small positive impact on community resilience.

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## BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF EXPEDITED BILL 4-23

The National Digital Inclusion Alliance defines digital equity as “a condition in which all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy, and economy. Digital equity is necessary for civic and cultural participation, employment, lifelong learning, and access to essential services.”<sup>1</sup>

The goal of Expedited Bill 4-23 is to enhance the County's focus on digital equity issues and establish a central point for the coordination and oversight of digital equity initiatives.<sup>2</sup> The Bill seeks to achieve this goal by establishing a second, non-merit Special Projects Manager in the Office of the County Executive.<sup>3</sup> According to the County Executive, a major initiative for the Special Projects Manager would be to help constituents “leap the digital divide” by:

- coordinating efforts to extend the physical infrastructure needed to access high speed broadband in the County;
- expanding access to affordable high-speed broadband, home computers, and digital literacy training;
- seeking and deploying grants;
- establishing a network of digital navigators;
- creating a comprehensive online digital literacy resource portal; and
- managing relationships with County Government and local partners, such as educational institutions, employers, and Worksource Montgomery, to align County efforts on equity, digital literacy, and career training.<sup>4</sup>

Expedited Bill 4-23, Administration - Non-Merit Positions - Special Projects Manager, was introduced by the Council on behalf of the County Executive on January 31, 2023.

## METHODOLOGIES, ASSUMPTIONS, AND UNCERTAINTIES

**Methodology.** A literature review on linkages between community resilience and digital equity, and a review of local data on digital equity was conducted for this assessment.

**Assumptions.** The assessment assumes that the creation of this Special Projects Manager position will lead to increased digital equity in Montgomery County.

**Uncertainties.** Some uncertainties that could affect the impact of this bill on community resilience are: (1) The specific projects that will be undertaken are unknown, as well as resources dedicated to future projects; (2) the extent that this position will focus on digital equity, since it is not the only responsibility outlined on the job announcement; and (3) the extent to which digital equity will be increased by this position.

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## COMMUNITY RESILIENCE AND DIGITAL EQUITY

Climate change has contributed to more frequent and severe extreme weather events.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, it is growing increasingly crucial to rapidly share emergency information with as many constituents as possible. Official emergency communications can aid a community in preparing for, responding to, and recovering quickly from disruptions, such as extreme weather events.<sup>6</sup> With the growing shift of government officials, including the internet in emergency communications infrastructure, it is vital to access the internet to increase community resilience.<sup>7</sup>

Montgomery County currently has programs, such as “Montgomery Connects” which focus on digital equity and inclusion.<sup>8</sup> However, there are still households, primarily low-income, without internet and computer access in the County. According to 2021 U.S. Census data, about 94% of County households have an internet subscription, while about 11% of low-income County households (less than \$50,000 annual income) do not have an internet subscription.<sup>9</sup> Achieving digital equity in the County, where everyone has a minimum of a stable internet connection, devices to use the internet, and digital literacy, can lead to a small but positive increase in community resilience.

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## ANTICIPATED IMPACTS

Expedited Bill 4-23 could have a minimal positive impact on the County’s contribution to addressing climate change, as establishing a position with a focus on digital equity could have a small, positive impact on community resilience. While it is uncertain how much time and resources will be given to the position’s initiative on digital equity, OLO assumes there will be at least a small, positive impact on the resilience of the County. Increasing constituents’ access to emergency information can help individuals and communities prepare for, respond to, and recover more quickly from extreme weather events.

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## RECOMMENDED AMENDMENTS

The Climate Assessment Act requires OLO to offer recommendations, such as amendments or other measures to mitigate any anticipated negative climate impacts.<sup>10</sup> OLO does not offer recommendations or amendments as Bill 4-23 could have a minimal positive impact on the County's contribution to addressing climate change, as it could have a small positive impact on community resilience.

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## CAVEATS

OLO notes two caveats to this climate assessment. First, predicting the impacts of legislation upon climate change is a challenging analytical endeavor due to data limitations, uncertainty, and the broad, global nature of climate change. Second, the analysis performed here is intended to inform the legislative process, not determine whether the Council should enact legislation. Thus, any conclusion made in this statement does not represent OLO's endorsement of, or objection to, the bill under consideration.

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## PURPOSE OF CLIMATE ASSESSMENTS

The purpose of the Climate Assessments is to evaluate the anticipated impact of legislation on the County's contribution to addressing climate change. These climate assessments will provide the Council with a more thorough understanding of the potential climate impacts and implications of proposed legislation, at the County level. The scope of the Climate Assessments is limited to the County's contribution to addressing climate change, specifically upon the County's contribution to greenhouse gas emissions and how actions suggested by legislation could help improve the County's adaptive capacity to climate change, and therefore, increase community resilience.

While co-benefits such as health and cost savings may be discussed, the focus is on how proposed County bills may impact GHG emissions and community resilience.

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## CONTRIBUTIONS

OLO staffer Kaitlyn Simmons drafted this assessment.

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<sup>1</sup> [Definitions, National Digital Inclusion Alliance, Accessed 2/9/23](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Legislative Request Report](#).

<sup>3</sup> [Bill 4-23](#).

<sup>4</sup> Elrich to Glass, [Memorandum](#).

<sup>5</sup> [Climate Change Indicators: Weather and Climate, Environmental Protection Agency, Accessed 2/11/23](#).

<sup>6</sup> [Building Community Capacity and Fostering Disaster Resilience, Gil-Rivas, Virginia and Kilmer, Ryan P., 3/18/16](#)

<sup>7</sup> [National Emergency Communications Plan, Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency \(CISA\), 9/2019](#)

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<sup>8</sup> [Montgomery Connects, Department of Technology & Enterprise Business Solutions \(TEBS\) and Office of Broadband Programs, Accessed 2/10/23](#)

<sup>9</sup> [2021 American Community Survey, US Census Bureau, Accessed 2/11/23](#)

<sup>10</sup> Bill 3-22, Legislative Branch – Climate Assessments – Required, Montgomery County Council, Effective date October 24, 2022