

JAY INSLEE
Governor



JAMES WEAVER
Director &
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STATE OF WASHINGTON

WASHINGTON TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS

Washington's Consolidated Technology Services Agency

1500 Jefferson Street SE • Olympia, Washington 98504-1501

April 10, 2020

The Hon. Patty Murray, Senator
The Hon. Suzan DelBene, Representative
The Hon. Jaime Herrera Beutler, Representative
The Hon. Cathy McMorris Rodgers, Representative
The Hon. Pramila Jayapal, Representative
The Hon. Adam Smith, Representative

The Hon. Maria Cantwell, Senator
The Hon. Rick Larsen, Representative
The Hon. Dan Newhouse, Representative
The Hon. Derek Kilmer, Representative
The Hon. Kim Schrier, Representative
The Hon. Denny Heck, Representative

United States Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Urgent need for information technology infrastructure investment

Dear members of the Washington State Congressional Delegation:

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, state government services have been put under intense pressure to respond and provide services to our citizens. Washington has seen a significant surge in unemployment claims and individuals applying for benefits. Congress has taken admirable action to date to shore up these benefits for Washingtonians, but there are additional costs beyond the direct benefits that should be considered.

To support the delivery of constituent services during this pandemic, additional information technology (IT) resources are needed. These additional IT resources are critical and necessary to ensure that all Washingtonians who need benefits can successfully interact with the state. Virtually every citizen interaction with the state is done through technology, and these resources have seen an intense surge to meet the new demand. Washington's government agencies have done a valiant job in responding to ensure availability and provide more capacity to meet additional demand. Our state's Stay Home, Stay Healthy order adds an additional layer of complexity to meeting this demand, as most of the work is now being done remotely by state agency staff. Providing this additional capacity and mobile workforce support does not come without costs.

As Congress considers additional stimulus funding, we encourage Congressional leaders to consider providing a dedicated funding program to provide support for increased IT infrastructure needs in state and local governments across the country.

To help quantify this need, below are some examples of additional IT demand that we have seen in Washington state during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- **Secure access to systems:** As more work is done remotely, tracking security risks and vulnerabilities becomes increasingly challenging, and additional resources are needed to ensure that state systems and data can be protected and kept secure. As an example, Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) are necessary to support a mobile government workforce securely. Our baseline of VPN usage by state employees prior to COVID-19 was about 5,000 users per day. During this pandemic, VPN usage has soared to a peak of over 27,000 daily users of the service.

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- **SecureAccess Washington (SAW):** Washington provides a secure portal for accessing a variety of government services called SecureAccess Washington (SAW). This service is necessary for accessing several state systems securely, including the state's unemployment benefits portal. SAW has seen an increase of nearly three quarters of a million registered users during the pandemic. Concurrent users of this secure service to access the Employment Security Department's benefits portal has increased 1,700%.
- **Remote workstation hardware:** To support the rapid addition of employees who are working remotely, agencies have procured additional laptops and hardware to support their employee's ability to work away from the office.
- **Telephone and teleconference services:** The state has seen an increase in the use of software telephone technology, which allows for existing phone services to be extended to remote workers. Our state has seen an increase of almost 300% in utilization of technology in the past 10 days. Additionally, teleconferencing demand to support remote meetings has increased by 127%.
- **Increased support center demand:** As citizens engage with more government services, there is an increased demand on troubleshooting and other support functions. Agency call centers are fielding additional calls from the public as information is being sought to secure access to needed benefits.
- **Configuration changes for applications:** Incorporating changes and new requirements for benefits laid out in previous stimulus bills incurs additional costs as vendors must be engaged and work orders must be processed.
- **Purchase of additional technology capacity:** In some circumstances, agencies must procure additional software licenses to support increased system demand and scale their solutions appropriately. For critical applications, additional servers and other infrastructure may need to be purchased to guarantee availability of systems.

Since this situation changes and evolves every day, additional impact to IT systems will continue. Already, the state has made investments to shore up our technology resources. Additional work will certainly need to be done, and the total cost to the state to do so throughout the lifecycle of this pandemic response is sure to be in the several millions of dollars.

On behalf of the Washington Technology Solutions and statewide technology leaders, we thank you for your work in advocating for stimulus funding to address critical IT needs. If you have any questions, please contact Derek Puckett, Legislative Affairs Director, at 360-464-0522.

Sincerely,



James A. Weaver
Director & State Chief Information Officer

cc: Casey Katims, Washington, D.C. Office
Derek Puckett, Legislative Affairs Director