



New York Civil Liberties Union
125 Broad Street, 19th Floor
New York, NY 10004
(212) 607-3300
www.nyclu.org

2023-2024 Legislative Memorandum

Subject: Provides internet access to all individuals residing in temporary housing - A.5649 (Reyes) / S.4561 (Gonzalez)

Position: SUPPORT

Lack of internet access severely disadvantages homeless people across nearly all aspects of life. Without connectivity, they cannot effectively search for jobs or permanent housing, participate in remote education or complete homework, access government benefits and services, or get health care and legal services. The lasting impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have only increased reliance on internet access across all these areas. To allow vulnerable New Yorkers to fall through the digital divide is unconscionable.

A.5649 (Reyes) / S.4561 (Gonzalez) would require New York State to provide reliable, privacy-preserving, high-speed internet access to all people in temporary housing. The NYCLU strongly supports this legislation and calls for its immediate passage.

This legislation is urgently needed to close the digital divide for homeless shelter residents and increase opportunities for education, employment, and housing. Reliable internet would also connect residents to critical government, health, and legal services they otherwise could not access. High-speed internet access would additionally help foster mental health and community connections.

Providing the internet to those without housing is not just an issue of technology access - it is one of racial justice. The vast majority of homeless single adults and heads-of-household identify as Black or Hispanic.¹ Any policy that bridges the digital divide for these New Yorkers is an essential step to addressing racial disparities in the state.

Passing this bill is imperative to uphold New York's responsibilities to its most vulnerable residents. All New Yorkers deserve reliable access to high-speed internet, regardless of housing status.

The New York Civil Liberties Union strongly supports A.5649/S.4561 and urges lawmakers to pass it promptly.

¹ State of the Homeless 2022, Coalition for the Homeless, March 2022, at 21, <https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/StateofThe-Homeless2022.pdf>.