

The Florida Senate
BILL ANALYSIS AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Committee on Commerce and Tourism

BILL: SB 2004

INTRODUCER: Senator Burgess

SUBJECT: Broadband Internet

DATE: March 12, 2021

REVISED: _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Harmsen	McKay	CM	Pre-meeting
2.			CA	
3.			RC	

I. Summary:

SB 2004 requires the Office of Broadband (Office) within the Department of Economic Opportunity to address additional areas in its strategic plan. Specifically, the Office must develop short-term and long-term goals and strategies to increase the availability of and access to broadband Internet service in Florida; incorporate federal broadband activities that may improve Florida's broadband Internet service; and identify available federal funding for the expansion or improvement of broadband Internet service. The bill requires the Office to complete and submit its strategic plan by June 30, 2022.

Additionally, the bill requires the Office to provide technical and planning assistance to Florida's rural communities' broadband Internet infrastructure projects.

II. Present Situation:

Broadband Internet Deployment

Fixed and mobile broadband Internet services provide access to numerous employment, education, entertainment, and health care opportunities.¹ Access to a sufficient internet connection has only grown more important during the COVID-19 pandemic, which requires many Americans to connect to their family and friends, schooling, work, and even medical appointments over the internet.² While Florida's urban areas are served at a fixed broadband

¹ U.S. Federal Communications Commission, *2018 Broadband Deployment Report*, at 1 (Feb. 2, 2018), available at <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/FCC-18-10A1.pdf> (last visited Mar. 12, 2021).

² Federal Communications Commission, *Emergency Broadband Benefit Report and Order*, pp. 2-3 (Feb. 26, 2021), available at <https://www.fcc.gov/broadbandbenefit> (last visited Mar. 12, 2021).

coverage rate of 98 percent, its rural areas are served at a rate of 78.6 percent.³ This disparity is caused primarily by high per-unit construction costs required to build broadband infrastructure across larger swaths of rural geographic areas.⁴ Communities that lack broadband access can have difficulty attracting new capital investment.⁵ Additionally, data indicates that low-income households disproportionately lack access to broadband Internet service, which puts children in those households at risk of falling behind.⁶

Broadband internet is a high speed internet that is faster than dial-up access and is always on; in 2015, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) defined broadband as 25/3 megabits per second (Mbps), i.e., 25 Mbps (download rate) and 3 Mbps (upload rate).⁷ Consumers can receive Broadband internet through several different technologies, including a digital subscriber line (DSL), a cable modem, fiber, wireless, satellite, and broadband over power lines.⁸

Other State Action

All 50 states have created either a task force, commission, or authority to coordinate broadband expansion.⁹ One organization has studied the work of several state broadband offices authorities, and determined that effective practices include stakeholder outreach and engagement at both the state and local levels; thorough development of a policy framework with well-defined goals; adoption of a state broadband plan; and helping communities identify their broadband goals and needs to better connect them with satisfactory resources.¹⁰

³ U.S. Federal Communication Commission, *2021 Broadband Deployment Report* at 58. (Jan. 19, 2021), available at <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/FCC-21-18A1.pdf> (last visited Mar. 12, 2021). For purposes of this data, ‘fixed broadband services’ are measured at 25 megabits per second downstream and 3 megabits per second upstream.

⁴ National Telecommunications and Information Administration, American Broadband Initiative, *Milestones Report*, at 11 (Feb. 13, 2019), available at https://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/sites/default/files/resource-files/american_broadband_initiative_milestones_report_feb_2019_0.pdf (last visited Mar. 12, 2021). See also, Congressional Research Service, *Broadband Internet Access and the Digital Divide: Federal Assistance Programs*, p. 7 (Oct. 25, 2019), available at <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/RL30719.pdf> (last visited Mar. 12, 2021).

⁵ Congressional Research Service, *Broadband Internet Access and the Digital Divide: Federal Assistance Programs*, supra note 4 at p. 8.

⁶ New American Economy Research Fund, *Back to School: A Look at the Internet Access Gap* (Aug. 6, 2020), <https://research.newamericaneconomy.org/report/internet-access-covid-19/> (last visited Mar. 12, 2021).

⁷ Colby Leigh Rachfal, Congressional Research Service, *State Broadband Initiatives: Selected State and Local Approaches as Potential Models for Federal Initiatives to Address the Digital Divide* (Apr. 6, 2020), available at <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R46307> (last visited Mar. 12, 2021), citing Federal Communications Commission, *2019 Broadband Deployment Report*, p. 5 (May 29, 2019), available at <https://www.fcc.gov/reports-research/reports/broadband-progress-reports/2019-broadband-deployment-report> (last visited Mar. 12, 2021).

⁸ Congressional Research Service, *Broadband Internet Access and the Digital Divide: Federal Assistance Programs*, p. 1 (Oct. 25, 2019), available at <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/RL30719.pdf> (last visited Mar. 12, 2021).

⁹ NCSL, *State Broadband Task Forces, Commissions or Authorities and Other Broadband Resources* (June 2020), <https://www.ncsl.org/research/telecommunications-and-information-technology/state-broadband-task-forces-commissions.aspx> (last visited Mar. 12, 2021).

¹⁰ Kathryn de Wit, Pew Charitable Trusts, *How States are Expanding Broadband Access* (Feb. 27, 2020), <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/reports/2020/02/how-states-are-expanding-broadband-access> (last visited Mar. 12, 2021).

Florida's Office of Broadband

In 2020 the Legislature created the Florida Office of Broadband (Office) within the Department of Economic Opportunity (Department).¹¹ The Office is tasked with developing, marketing, and promoting broadband Internet service in the state.

Specifically, the Office must:

- Create a strategic plan for increasing the use of broadband Internet service in Florida which must include a process to review and verify public input regarding transmission speeds and availability of broadband Internet service throughout the state;
- Build local technology planning teams representing, among others, libraries, schools, colleges and universities, local health care providers, private businesses, community organizations, economic development organizations, local governments, tourism, parks and recreation, and agriculture;
- Encourage the use of broadband Internet service, especially in rural, unserved, and underserved¹² areas of the state through grant programs; and
- Monitor, participate in, and provide input in proceedings of the FCC and other federal agencies related to the geographic availability and deployment of broadband Internet service as necessary to ensure that Florida's rural, unserved, and underserved areas are best positioned to benefit from federal and state broadband deployment programs.¹³

The DEO may apply for and accept federal grant funds, enter into necessary or useful contracts, and establish any committee or workgroup to further the above goals.¹⁴

Federal Broadband Programs

FCC Digital Opportunity Data Collection Program

The FCC collects and monitors data on broadband deployment in order to identify underserved and unserved localities in the United States.¹⁵ In August 2019, the FCC adopted the Digital Opportunity Data Collection Program, which modernized the collection of broadband deployment data by creating granular coverage maps, as opposed to census tract maps, and by implementing a process to accept public data to confirm the maps' accuracy.¹⁶ In March 2020, Congress ratified the FCC's Data Collection Program with passage of the Broadband Data Act, which requires the FCC to establish a semiannual collection of geographically granular

¹¹ Ch. 2020-26, Laws of Fla.

¹² Section 364.0135(2)(d), F.S., defines the term "underserved" to mean a geographic area of this state in which there is no provider of broadband Internet service that offers a connection to the Internet with a capacity for transmission at a consistent speed of at least 10 Mbps downstream and at least 1 Mbps upstream

¹³ Section 364.0135(4), F.S.

¹⁴ Section 364.0135(5), F.S.

¹⁵ Federal Communications Commission, *Establishing the Digital Opportunity Data Collection* pp. 1-2 (Jan. 19, 2021), WC Docket No. 19-195, available at <https://www.fcc.gov/document/fcc-takes-next-step-collect-more-precise-broadband-mapping-data> (last visited Mar. 12, 2021).

¹⁶ *Id.* at p. 3. See also, Federal Communications Commission, *Digital Opportunity Data Collection Order and Further Notice*, 34 FCC Rcd at 7506, 7521, paras. 2, 3, 35.

broadband coverage data to use to create coverage maps.¹⁷ Congress has allocated \$65 million to the FCC to achieve this mapping project.¹⁸

To create these geographic service maps, the FCC collects information from service providers according to specific reporting standards. The service providers must report their service coverage areas, including where their services were available to residences or businesses, and the speed and latency at which their services are delivered.¹⁹ The FCC also considers public testimony regarding service availability.

FCC's Rural Digital Opportunity Fund

In January 2020, the FCC established the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (Fund) to fund the deployment of broadband networks in rural America over the next decade. The first phase of the Fund began in 2020 and made available up to \$16 billion to target census blocks that are wholly unserved by fixed broadband speeds of at least 25 megabits per second (Mbps) downstream and 3 Mbps upstream (25/3 Mbps).²⁰ Florida entities received over \$190 million (to be distributed over the next 10 years) in this first round of funding.²¹

Phase II of the Fund will target underserved localities, as identified by the FCC's Digital Opportunity Data Collection Program.²² Using this more precise data, the second phase of FCC grants will make available at least \$4.4 billion to target geographic areas where some locations lack access to 25/3 Mbps broadband.²³

FCC's Emergency Broadband Benefit Program

Congress appropriated \$3.2 billion to expand broadband access via subsidies for broadband service to students, families, and unemployed workers.²⁴ Eligible households can receive a discount of up to \$50 per month off their broadband service bill. A household is eligible to receive subsidies under the bill if any member of the household:²⁵ qualifies for the Lifeline program, receives benefits under the free or reduce-price school lunch program, received a Federal Pell Grant, experienced a substantial loss of income in the last year and has a total

¹⁷ 47 U.S.C. §§642(a)(1)(A), (a)(2).

¹⁸ Marguerite Reardon, CNET, *FCC Chair Rosenworcel Launches Broadband Mapping Taskforce* (Feb. 17, 2021), <https://www.cnet.com/news/fcc-chair-rosenworcel-launches-broadband-mapping-task-force/> (last visited Mar. 12, 2021).

¹⁹ Federal Communications Commission, *Establishing the Digital Opportunity Data Collection* pp. 5, 8-16 (Jan. 19, 2021), WC Docket No. 19-195, available at <https://www.fcc.gov/document/fcc-takes-next-step-collect-more-precise-broadband-mapping-data> (last visited Mar. 12, 2021).

²⁰ Federal Communications Commission, *FCC Launches \$20 Billion Rural Digital Opportunity Fund*, (last visited Mar. 12, 2021).

²¹ Federal Communications Commission, *Auction 904 Winning Bidders: Attachment A*, available at <https://www.fcc.gov/document/auction-904-winning-bidders> (last visited Mar. 12, 2021).

²² See, FCC Digital Opportunity Data Collection Program, *supra*.

²³ Federal Communications Commission, *Rural Digital Opportunity Fund Report and Order*, p. 3 (Feb. 7, 2020) WC Docket 19-126, available at <https://www.fcc.gov/document/fcc-launches-20-billion-rural-digital-opportunity-fund-0> (last visited Mar. 12, 2021).

²⁴ NCSL, *COVID-19 Economic Relief Bill: Broadband* (Jan. 4, 2021), <https://www.ncsl.org/ncsl-in-dc/publications-and-resources/covid-19-economic-relief-bill-stimulus.aspx> (last visited Mar. 12, 2021).

²⁵ Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021, H.R. 133, 116th Cong., s. 904 (a)(6) (2021).

household income in 2020 below \$99,000 for single filers and \$198,000 for joint filers, or meets criteria to participate in service providers' existing low-income or COVID-19 program.²⁶

U.S. Department of Agriculture ReConnect Program

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), through its ReConnect Program, offers federal loans, grants, and loan/grant combinations to facilitate broadband deployment to rural areas without access to sufficient broadband service.²⁷ Eligible entities include cooperatives and non-profits, for-profit companies, and state and local governments and their agencies and political subdivisions. Applicants for a grant or a loan/grant combination under the ReConnect Program must submit a scoring sheet by which USDA may analyze nine separate evaluation criteria to score the application. One of the evaluation criteria is whether the proposed project is in a state with a broadband plan that has been updated within the previous 5 years.²⁸

Federal assets to assist with the expansion and promotion of broadband comes from a variety of sources, for example:²⁹

- The FCC's E-Rate Universal Service Fund subsidizes telephone service (including broadband Internet access) to low-income households, high-cost areas, rural healthcare providers, and eligible schools and libraries;³⁰
- The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development³¹ and Department of Education³² offer block grants to support broadband infrastructure;
- The U.S. Department of Agriculture's ReConnect Program offers federal loans and grants to facilitate broadband deployment to rural areas that lack sufficient broadband service;³³
- The Department of the Interior launched a mapping tool to allow service providers to locate federal property available for infrastructure development;³⁴ and

²⁶ Federal Communications Commission, *Emergency Broadband Benefit*, <https://www.fcc.gov/broadbandbenefit> (last visited Mar. 12, 2021).

²⁷ U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Broadband*, <https://www.usda.gov/broadband> (last visited Mar. 12, 2021).

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ See generally, National Telecommunications and Information Administration, American Broadband Initiative, *Progress Report*, (June 2020), available at https://www.ntia.doc.gov/files/ntia/publications/abi_progress_report_june2020.pdf (last visited Mar. 12, 2021).

³⁰ Federal Communications Commission, E-Rate: Universal Service Program for Schools and Libraries (Sep. 16, 2020), <https://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/universal-service-program-schools-and-libraries-e-rate> (last visited Mar. 12, 2021). The Universal Service Administrative Company is a not-for-profit designated by the FCC to administer the Universal Service Fund. See also, Universal Service Administrative Co., E-Rate

³¹ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *State CDBG Program Broadband Infrastructure FAQs* (Jan. 7, 2016), <https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/State-CDBG-Program-Broadband-Infrastructure-FAQs.pdf> (last visited Mar. 12, 2021).

³² U.S. Department of Education, Rural and Low-Income School Program, <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/reaprlisp/index.html> (last visited Mar. 12, 2021). See also, Broadband USA, *Funding Guide - Department of Education - Rural and Low-Income School Program*, <https://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/funding-program-details-funding-guide/department-education-rural-low-income-school-program-0> (last visited Mar. 12, 2021).

³³ U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Broadband*, <https://www.usda.gov/broadband> (last visited Mar. 12, 2021).

³⁴ U.S. Department of Interior, *Supporting Broadband Tower Facilities in Rural America on Federal Properties Managed at Interior*, <https://www.doi.gov/broadband> (last visited Mar. 12, 2021).

- The National Telecommunications and Information Administration within the U.S. Department of Commerce is working to improve coordination between Federal programs that fund broadband and statewide efforts.³⁵

Additionally, the latest COVID-19 relief bill passed by Congress³⁶ included the following funding to expand broadband Internet access for students, families, and unemployed workers:³⁷

- \$300 million for rural broadband;³⁸
- \$250 million for the FCC’s telehealth program;³⁹
- \$285 million to fund a pilot program to assist with broadband issues at historically Black colleges and universities;⁴⁰
- \$1.9 billion for “rip and replace” efforts related to Huawei and ZTE equipment in U.S. networks;⁴¹ and
- \$1 billion in grants for tribal broadband programs.⁴²

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

The Office is currently required to draft a strategic plan for increasing the use of broadband Internet service in Florida. **Section 1** of the bill adds additional subject matter areas that the Office must address the strategic plan, specifically:

- Short and long-term goals that increase the availability of, and access to broadband Internet service in Florida;
- Federal broadband activities, specifically those implemented by the FCC, that may improve broadband Internet service in Florida; and
- Federal funding sources that may be used to expand or improve broadband Internet service in Florida.

³⁵ Broadband USA, *State Broadband Leaders Network* (Dec. 19, 2018), <https://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/ntia-resources/state-broadband-leaders-network-sbln> (last visited Mar. 12, 2021).

³⁶ Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021, H.R. 133, 116th Cong. (2021).

³⁷ NCSL, *COVID-19 Economic Relief Bill: Broadband* (Jan. 4, 2021), <https://www.ncsl.org/ncsl-in-dc/publications-and-resources/covid-19-economic-relief-bill-stimulus.aspx> (last visited Mar. 12, 2021).

³⁸ See generally, National Telecommunications and Information Administration, *Overview of Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021: Broadband Infrastructure Deployment Grants*, <https://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/ntia-common-content/overview-consolidated-appropriations-act-2021> (last visited Mar. 12, 2021). These grants will be available to support infrastructure for the deployment of fixed broadband service in a census block with at least one household or business that does not have access to internet at a speed of 25/3Mbps or higher.

³⁹ Federal Communications Commission, *COVID-19 Telehealth Program* (Feb. 9, 2021), <https://www.fcc.gov/covid-19-telehealth-program> (last visited Mar. 12, 2021).

⁴⁰ See generally, National Telecommunications and Information Administration, *Office of Minority Broadband Initiative*, <https://www.ntia.doc.gov/category/minority-broadband-initiative> (last visited Mar. 12, 2021).

⁴¹ B. Braverman, M. Browne, and J. Mark, *Let Her Rip! FCC Adopts Remove-and-Replace Rules* (Jan. 15, 2021), <https://www.dwt.com/insights/2021/01/fcc-huawei-zte-rip-and-replace-rules> (last visited Mar. 12, 2021). See also, Federal Communications Commission, *Second Report and Order in re: Protecting Against National Security Threats to the Communications Supply Chain Through FCC Programs* (Dec. 10, 2020), WC Docket No. 18-89, available at <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/FCC-20-176A1.pdf> (last visited Mar. 12, 2021).

⁴² See generally, National Telecommunications and Information Administration, *NTIA Announces Tribal Consultations on New Program to Increase Broadband Access Across Indian Country* (Feb. 5, 2021), <https://www.ntia.gov/blog/2021/ntia-announces-tribal-consultations-new-program-increase-broadband-access-across-indian> (last visited Mar. 12, 2021).

The bill also requires that the Office complete and submit its strategic plan to the Governor, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, the President of the Florida Senate, and the Speaker of the Florida House of Representatives by June 30, 2022.

Section 1 of the bill expands the Office's duties to include the provision of technical and planning assistance relating to broadband infrastructure to rural communities.

Section 2 provides that the bill takes effect on July 1, 2021.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

D. State Tax or Fee Increases:

None.

E. Other Constitutional Issues:

None identified.

V. Fiscal Impact Statement:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

The Office's planning and execution of its duties may help localities secure funding for broadband Internet service, which will positively impact its citizens' business and personal needs. Additionally, communities with sufficient broadband Internet service may better attract or retain business.

C. Government Sector Impact:

None.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Statutes Affected:

This bill substantially amends section 364.0135 of the Florida Statutes.

IX. Additional Information:

A. Committee Substitute – Statement of Changes:

(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

None.

B. Amendments:

None.