

# **CLOSING PA'S DIGITAL DIVIDE**

**Senate Communications &  
Technology Committee  
Senator Kristin Phillips-Hill, Chair**

**REPORT & RECOMMENDATIONS**

**November 13, 2019**

## CLOSING PA'S DIGITAL DIVIDE

# SOLUTIONS

- Funding
- Remove Regulatory Barriers
- Maximize Existing Assets & Data Availability



# 4 PUBLIC HEARINGS

- Indiana County
- Monroe County
- Fayette County
- State Capitol

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) defines high-speed broadband as download speeds of at least 25 megabits per second and upload speeds of at least 3 megabits per second.

The FCC released maps in December of 2017 showing that every county has high-speed broadband availability.

The FCC estimated that approximately 800,000 Pennsylvanians lacked access to high-speed broadband.

In 2019, the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, in conjunction with Penn State University, found that no county has more than 50 percent of its population above the FCC definition of high-speed broadband. Their study concluded that over 11 million Pennsylvanians lack access to high-speed broadband, based on the FCC's definition.

The Senate Communications & Technology Committee, chaired by Senator Kristin Phillips-Hill, held four public hearing featuring stakeholders on the topic of closing the state's digital divide. This report contains solutions based on the testimony presented at those public hearings.

All information from the public hearings, including testimony and video, is available on the committee's website at [communications.pasenategop.com](http://communications.pasenategop.com)

# **FUNDING**

- Establish a dedicated funding source to the deployment of high-speed broadband in unserved and underserved areas.
- Senate Bill 835 (Langerholc) - Broadband Accessibility Funding & Grant Program
- Offer tax credits for broadband deployment.
- Encourage the FCC to transform the Universal Service Fund program into a rural broadband voucher program that would directly benefit rural customers.
- Allocate Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to broadband planning efforts.



# **REMOVE REGULATORY BARRIERS**

- Increase the minimum required upload and download speeds.
- Simplify the process and reduce costs for pole attachments.
- Reduce permit times and ensure reasonable permit fees for providers.
- Increase access to rights-of way and easements.
- House Bill 1400 (Farry) - Establish uniform statewide rules for installing small cells on utility poles.



## **MAXIMIZE EXISTING ASSETS & DATA AVAILABILITY**

- **House Bill 305 (Snyder) & Senate Bill 470 (Phillips-Hill) - Require the Dept. of General Services to conduct an inventory of all state-owned assets for the deployment of high-speed broadband internet.**
- **Develop a comprehensive state broadband plan.**
- **Utilize proven non-governmental entities to build out broadband infrastructure.**
- **Leverage state and local assets, such as buildings and rights-of-way, to support underserved areas.**
- **Conduct a vertical asset (tower) inventory (HB305 & SB 470).**
- **Develop a map of all state and local agency assets for antenna placement.**
- **Increase the level of detail of Pennsylvania broadband availability maps and conduct detailed surveys to identify service gaps within rural areas.**

## **NEXT STEPS**

- Review outcomes of the Joint State Government Commission via Senate Resolution 47. This created the bipartisan, bicameral legislative commission to recommend improvements to the deployment of high-speed broadband services in unserved and underserved areas.
  - Due date: June 26, 2020
- Review outcomes of the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee via Senate Resolution 48. This requires the committee to conduct an audit into the compliance of non-rural telecommunication carriers with Act 67 of 1993 and Act 183 of 2004 (taxpayer subsidies through fees to deploy high-speed internet).
  - Due date: June 26, 2020

**LOADING...**

