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H.710

Introduced by Representative Browning of Arlington

Referred to Committee on

Date:

Subject: Telecommunications; Connectivity Initiative; schools

Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to require the Department of Public Service, when awarding grants under the Connectivity Initiative, to give priority to proposals that include upgrading broadband access at one or more public schools.

An act relating to the Connectivity Initiative and broadband access at public schools

It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

Sec. 1. 30 V.S.A. § 7515b is amended to read:

§ 7515b. CONNECTIVITY INITIATIVE

(a) The purpose of the Connectivity Initiative is to provide each service location in Vermont access to Internet service that is capable of speeds of at least 10 Mbps download and 1 Mbps upload, or the FCC speed requirements established under Connect America Fund Phase II, whichever is higher, beginning with locations not served as of December 31, 2013 according to the minimum technical service characteristic objectives applicable at that time.

1 Within this category of service locations, priority shall be given first to
2 unserved and then to underserved locations. As used in this section,
3 “unserved” means a location having access to only satellite or dial-up Internet
4 service and “underserved” means a location having access to Internet service
5 with speeds that exceed satellite and dial-up speeds but are less than 4 Mbps
6 download and 1 Mbps upload. Any new services funded in whole or in part by
7 monies from this Initiative shall be capable of being continuously upgraded to
8 reflect the best available, most economically feasible service capabilities.

9 (b) The Department of Public Service shall publish annually a list of census
10 blocks eligible for funding based on the Department’s most recent broadband
11 mapping data. The Department annually shall solicit proposals from service
12 providers to deploy broadband to eligible census blocks. The Department shall
13 give priority to proposals that reflect the lowest cost of providing services to
14 unserved and underserved locations, or that include upgrading Internet service
15 at one or more public schools that do not have access to “broadband” as
16 defined by the FCC, or both; however, the Department also shall consider:

17 (1) the proposed data transfer rates and other data transmission
18 characteristics of services that would be available to consumers;

19 (2) the price to consumers of services;

20 (3) the proposed cost to consumers of any new construction, equipment
21 installation service, or facility required to obtain service;

1 (4) whether the proposal would use the best available technology that is
2 economically feasible;

3 (5) the availability of service of comparable quality and speed; ~~and~~

4 (6) the objectives of the State's Telecommunications Plan;

5 (7) the ability of a public school to have Internet connectivity to any
6 other district or supervisory union that meets the most recent standards for high
7 speed Internet upload and download capacities;

8 (8) whether a public school has a percentage of students receiving free
9 or reduced lunches that is above the State average;

10 (9) whether the community in which a public school is situated does not
11 have high speed Internet connectivity; and

12 (10) whether the community in which a public school is situated is rural
13 and has a percentage of households categorized as low-income that is higher
14 than the State average.

15 Sec. 2. 24 V.S.A. § 5609 is added to read:

16 § 5609. SCHOOL CONNECTIVITY GRANT PROGRAM

17 (a) Creation. There is created a School Connectivity Grant Program to
18 provide competitive grants to schools for capital costs associated with
19 state-of-the-art educational applications and equipment. The Program is
20 authorized to award grants of up to \$50,000.00 per project. The Department of
21 Public Service shall administer and coordinate the Program.

1 (b) Priorities. The criteria for awarding grants under the Program shall be
2 consistent with the following priorities:

3 (1) the school has a percentage of students receiving free or reduced
4 lunches that is above the State average;

5 (2) the community in which the school is situated is rural and has a
6 percentage of households categorized as low-income that is higher than the
7 State average; or

8 (3) the school has received upgraded Internet service within the prior
9 three calendar years, or is expected to receive upgraded Internet service in the
10 coming calendar year.

11 (c) Notwithstanding section 5601 of this chapter, there are no match
12 requirements for the grants awarded in subsection (a) of this section.

13 Sec. 3. FY 2017 CAPITAL APPROPRIATION; CONNECTIVITY

14 INITIATIVE; SCHOOL CONNECTIVITY GRANT PROGRAM

15 (a) The sum of \$1,000,000.00 is appropriated to the Connectivity Initiative,
16 established in 30 V.S.A. § 7515b, from the bond premium in the FY 17 Capital
17 Budget Adjustment Act.

18 (b) The sum of \$200,000.00 is appropriated to the School Connectivity
19 Grant Program, established in 24 V.S.A. § 5609, from the FY 17 Capital
20 Budget Adjustment Act.

1 Sec. 4. EFFECTIVE DATE

2 This act shall take effect on passage.