

# **2020 VERMONT COVID-RESPONSE CONNECTIVITY PROGRAMS**

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# RELEVANT 2020 LEGISLATION

- Act 137 (H.966; COVID-19 funding and assistance), effective July 2, 2020
  - Coronavirus Relief Fund established by the federal CARES Act
  - \$200+M (of the \$1.25B) for broadband, housing, and economic relief
- Act 154 (H.969; i.e., FY 2021 “big bill”), effective October 2, 2020



# ABC PROGRAM – GENERAL PROVISIONS

## (SEC. 13 OF ACT 137)

- Accelerated Broadband Connectivity (ABC) Program
- \$17,433,500 appropriation
- Purpose: to rapidly and significantly increase broadband connectivity consistent with CRF parameters in a manner that best serves the State's goal of achieving universal 100/100 Mbps service by 2024
  - Necessary
  - Unbudgeted
  - Incurred during the covered period (March 1, 202 through December 30, 2020)
- 5 programs and initiatives

## ABC PROGRAM – GENERAL PROVISIONS (CONT'D.)

- Guidelines: significantly increase broadband capacity for distance learning, telehealth, and telework; and attempt to direct funds to economically-challenged households or communities
  - 25/3 Mbps; however, when feasible, priority to 100/100 Mbps
  - Public database – location and capacity of funded infrastructure
  - TCAB and CUD notice. Commissioner can override CUD objection, reasons in writing
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## **ABC PROGRAM – GENERAL PROVISIONS (CONT'D.)**

- Advance payments, if necessary for project commencement
  - Awards may be retained until incurred and properly documented
  - Coordination with stakeholders, including VELCO and FirstNet, to leverage assets
  - Monthly reporting to legislative committees
  - Confidentiality
  - Unexpended funds revert to State on December 20, 2020
  - Sunset date of January 1, 2021
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# 1. LINE EXTENSION CUSTOMER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

- Up to \$2M
  - Purpose: to provide financial assistance for customer costs (“contributions in aid of construction”) associated with line extensions to unserved locations
  - Unserved location = no access to 25/3 Mbps
  - Per customer cap of \$3K
  - Eligible locations must provide data related to remote learning, telehealth, and telework needs
  - Health care providers/schools can apply on behalf of patients/students
  - Most cost-effective and site-appropriate line extension
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## 2. GET VERMONTERS CONNECTED NOW INITIATIVE

- Funds distributed through the existing Connectivity Initiative
  - Grants to ISPs
  - Purpose: to offset customer costs of FTTP (fiber-to-the-premises) installations, including underground conduit where required, and service drops
  - Prioritization for underground conduit projects to low-income households with remote learning, telehealth, and telework needs
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### 3. TEMPORARY BROADBAND LIFELINE PROGRAM

- Subsidy program available to the extent administratively feasible within time constraints
  - Purpose: to provide subsidies for customer broadband monthly subscriptions to increase adoption rates
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## 4. (COVID) CONNECTIVITY INITIATIVE

- Purpose: to distribute CRF funds through the existing State grant program
  - For projects that can be completed by December 30, 2020
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## 5. WI-FI DEPLOYMENT

- Up to ~~\$50K~~ \$175K\*
- Purpose: to reimburse DPS and ADS for costs associated with deployment of Wi-Fi hotspots not covered by FEMA
- \* *Amendment in Act 154, Sec. B.1104*



# CONNECTED COMMUNITY RESILIENCE PROGRAM (SEC. 14)

- ~~\$800K~~ \$2.3M grant program administered by DPS\*
- Purpose: to fund recovery planning efforts of CUDs, particularly with regard to accelerating deployment schedules
- Eligible costs: consultant fees, admin expenses, any other recovery planning costs deemed appropriate by the Commissioner
- Award cap of ~~\$100K~~ \$400K\*

\* *Amendments in Act 154, Sec.B.1105.1*

# TELECOMMUNICATIONS RECOVERY PLAN (SEC. 15)

- \$500K to DPS
- Retain consultant to assist with plan preparation
- Purpose: Reassess the State's critical connectivity needs in light of the pandemic and to reevaluate deployment objectives going forward
- Due December 20, 2020

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- Sec. 16 specifies the next State 10-year Telecom Plan is due June 30, 2021



# TELEHEALTH CONNECTIVITY PROGRAM (SEC. 17)

- \$800K to the Department of Health
  - Administered by VPQHC (18 VSA § 9416)
  - Purpose: to support equitable access to telehealth services by providing outreach and educational opportunities that improve digital literacy skills of patients and providers; also by providing equipment, particularly in digitally and medically underserved areas, distributed geographically throughout the State
  - Prioritization for assistance to vulnerable and high-risk patients
  - Funds distributed on a rolling basis
  - Sunset December 31, 2020
  - Report to legislative committees on or before January 15, 2021
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## PEG ACCESS FUNDING AND STUDY (SECS. 18 AND 19)

- \$466,500 to DPS to be disbursed to AMOs
  - Purpose: to fund staffing and operational costs incurred due to unbudgeted and unplanned coverage of public meetings and events, and expenditures related to increased production and technical support for live-streaming government and community based organizations
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- Study by ACCD-retained consultant
    - (Act 154: Sec. B.1100(9) - \$100K; Sec. B.1105, repeals AMO analysis in Telecom Plan)
  - Purpose: to review the current business model of PEG TV channels and provide recommendations to ensure the future financial stability and viability
  - Due on or before January 15, 2021 (possible extension)



## UTILITY RATEPAYER ARREARAGES (SEC. 20)

- \$8M to DPS (VCAAP – VT COVID-19 Arrearage Assistance Program)
- Purpose: to simultaneously minimize financial hardship caused by pandemic and mitigate utility rate increases
- Financial support to ratepayers to cover account arrearages of ratepayers likely to face disconnection when PUC moratorium on involuntary disconnections ends
- \*Note: PUC lifted moratorium on October 15, 2020 and reinstated the moratorium on December 22, 2020 to last through March 31, 2021

## IT – ADS CYBERSECURITY (SEC. 21)

- \$2M to ADS
- Purpose: to mitigate cybersecurity risks posed by State employees working from home



## **E-911 FUNDING (SEC. 21A)**

- \$200K to E-911 Fund
  - Purpose: to fund necessary expenses incurred due to unbudgeted and unplanned critical public health and safety activities and services
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# ACT 154 – FY 2021 ONE-TIME GF APPROPRIATIONS AND MISC. (SEC.B.1100; SEC.B1105.2)

- \$250K to DPS for State 10-year Telecom Plan
  - \$1.5M to DPS for grants to CUDs
    - Purpose: to provide cash equity to secure loans to finance broadband projects, including the 10% of project costs required to securing financing through VEDA's Broadband Expansion Loan Program
    - A CUD may not receive more than \$400K in awards
  - Feasibility studies funded through the Broadband Innovation Grant Program must conclude within 12, rather than 6 months
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