

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
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SENATE BILL DRS45256-MQa-106

Short Title: Broadband Affordability Prog./Digital Equity. (Public)

Sponsors: Senators deViere, Chaudhuri, and Foushee (Primary Sponsors).

Referred to:

1 A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
2 AN ACT TO ESTABLISH THE NORTH CAROLINA BROADBAND ASSISTANCE
3 PROGRAM TO PROVIDE FUNDS TO ELIGIBLE LOW-INCOME FAMILIES TO HELP
4 MAKE BROADBAND ACCESS MORE AFFORDABLE.

5 The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

6 **SECTION 1.** As used in this act, the following definitions apply:

- 7 (1) Broadband service. – Defined in G.S. 143B-1374(a).
8 (2) Department. – The Department of Commerce.
9 (3) Low-income family. – A family unit with an annual household income that
10 does not exceed one hundred thirty-five percent (135%) of the federal poverty
11 level guidelines published by the United States Department of Health and
12 Human Services.

13 **SECTION 2.(a)** The Department shall establish the North Carolina Broadband
14 Assistance Program (Program) to ensure the affordability of broadband service to low-income
15 families. The Department shall coordinate with county departments of social services to
16 determine eligibility for low-income families for the Program, subject to the following Program
17 parameters:

- 18 (1) Families with annual household income at or below one hundred percent
19 (100%) of the federal poverty level are eligible for free broadband service.
20 (2) A credit of at least fifteen dollars (\$15.00) per month for broadband service is
21 payable monthly to families meeting all of the following criteria:
22 a. Families with annual household income above one hundred percent
23 (100%), but no greater than one hundred thirty-five percent (135%) of
24 the federal poverty level.
25 b. Families that include at least one adult individual or dependent child
26 who qualifies for or participates in at least one of the following
27 programs:
28 1. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.
29 2. Supplemental Security Income Program.
30 3. Veterans Pension and Survivors Benefits Programs.
31 4. Federal Public Housing Assistance Program.
32 5. National School Lunch Program.
33 6. Medical Assistance Program under Part 6 of Article 2 of
34 Chapter 108A of the General Statutes.
35 (3) Broadband service credits may be adjusted according to family size, as
36 determined by the Department.



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1 **SECTION 2.(b)** To be eligible for the Program, an applicant shall demonstrate, at
2 least annually, income qualifications in a manner satisfactory to the Department. Additionally,
3 Program recipients shall provide information to the Department sufficient to enable the
4 Department to provide funds directly to the broadband service provider on behalf of the Program
5 recipient. Program recipients shall be responsible for all charges not covered by Program funds
6 and for all other obligations under any contract with a broadband service provider. The
7 Department may terminate a Program recipient's eligibility for Program funds upon notification
8 by the broadband service provider that the Program recipient's account is more than 45 days past
9 due.

10 **SECTION 2.(c)** Beginning October 1, 2021, the Department of Commerce shall
11 submit a quarterly report on the Broadband Assistance Program established in this act to the Joint
12 Legislative Oversight Committee on Agriculture and Natural and Economic Resources and the
13 Fiscal Research Division. The report shall contain information detailing the following:

- 14 (1) The number of families applying for the program.
- 15 (2) The number of families that are determined to be eligible after applying.
- 16 (3) The number of families participating in the program and the duration.
- 17 (4) Any outreach activities undertaken by the Department or by any partner State
18 agencies.
- 19 (5) Any legislative recommendations relating to the Program.

20 **SECTION 3.** There is appropriated from the General Fund to the Department of
21 Commerce the sum of two hundred fifty million dollars (\$250,000,000) in nonrecurring funds
22 for the 2021-2022 fiscal year to be used for the North Carolina Broadband Assistance Program
23 described in this act.

24 **SECTION 4.** This act becomes effective July 1, 2021.