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OBAE proposes $10 million for broadband affordability

SANTA FE – Today, the New Mexico Office of Broadband Access and Expansion (OBAE) announced legislation to authorize $10 million in broadband funding to help low-income families afford broadband service.

Senate Bill 152 was introduced by Senate Majority Whip Michael Padilla (D-14) and prepared by OBAE in consultation with the New Mexico Public Regulation Commission (PRC). The funding would come from the State Rural Universal Service Fund, which by current statute, has $40 million specifically earmarked for broadband programs.

The legislation is called the “Low-Income Telecommunications Assistance Program (LITAP).”

"New Mexico has embraced the importance of a robust high speed broadband delivery strategy,” said **Sen. Michael Padilla**, Majority Whip. “Fully funding an internet affordability program ensures all New Mexicans can live successfully in the information age and have access to economic opportunities, healthcare options and distance learning.”

“OBAE and the PRC have met the challenge of broadband access so that every household and small business has the physical infrastructure to connect to the internet,” said **Jeff Lopez**, OBAE director. “Now, the biggest single barrier is affordability. This money would be used to provide broadband discounts to thousands of low-income families. Connecting New Mexicans is our main mission, but too many New Mexicans cannot afford high-speed internet, and we want to change that. Broadband is an essential utility and income should not be a factor when it comes to who is able to receive it.”

The proposal asks lawmakers to update the PRC statute to ensure that $10 million goes toward an affordability program. The legislation mandates that for the first year, the PRC uses $10 million for broadband affordability. During subsequent years, the bill specifies that the PRC may provide up to $45 million for affordability programs.

In April 2024 the federal government did not extend funding for the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), which offered low-income households and eligible consumers broadband discounts of up to $30 per month. Eligible customers who live on qualifying Tribal lands received enhanced support of up to $75 per month toward broadband services. When funding lapsed, more than 180,000 New Mexico families received the ACP benefit.

SB 152 would create a state version of the federal ACP and provide subsidies to help New Mexico families to afford high-speed internet. Discount amounts and other details would be established by the PRC.

The affordability legislation utilizes existing budget authorizations from the State Rural Universal Service Fund for the first year of the program.

The legislation also sustains PRC’s current telecommunications programs at established levels. The PRC’s broadband program releases funding to eligible rural telecommunications companies to build or maintain infrastructure. The access reduction support and comparable carrier support will continue to fund broadband maintenance and operations in rural communities.

The bill has been referred to the Senate Tax, Business and Transportation Committee. Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham sent a message to the Senate authorizing consideration during the 30-day session.

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The Office of Broadband Access and Expansion is dedicated to serving New Mexico with a commitment to make high-speed broadband accessible to all New Mexicans. OBAE’s mission is to expand and improve high-speed internet service with passionate leadership that drives bold, equitable, affordable and inclusive broadband solutions. OBAE seeks results that honor the state’s rich heritage and elevate quality of life for all.

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