



General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Joint State Government Commission
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***Report Summary in Response to Senate Resolution 47 of 2019
Delivery of High-Speed Broadband Services
in Unserved Areas and Underserved Areas of the Commonwealth***

Senate Resolution 47, Printer's No. 951, adopted on June 26, 2019, created a legislative task force on high-speed broadband services, and directed the Joint State Government Commission to conduct a study on the delivery of high-speed broadband services in unserved and underserved areas of the Commonwealth. The Commission was further directed to establish an advisory committee to assist in its study. The advisory committee included representatives from Commonwealth agencies with an interest in broadband delivery, as well as Internet service providers, and related cable, wireless, and other technology industries and associations.

This is the first of five reports the Commission, in collaboration with the advisory committee, is submitting. The report is comprehensive presentation of the technology and infrastructure that deliver Internet services to customers in both public and private sectors. The laws and regulations governing broadband services are discussed in detail. The report profiles broadband services around Pennsylvania and how coverage is affected by natural tensions between supply and demand, and regulation and competition. The report addresses the role of broadband in many aspects of life in Pennsylvania, including education, health care, agriculture, economic and community development, the arts, and tourism. Finally, the report provides the General Assembly with recommendations on how to address challenges to ensure broadband services are available throughout the commonwealth.

While the recommendations in this report are the consensus of the members of the Advisory Committee, it should not be assumed by the reader that agreement was unanimous. Some provisions were the subject of much debate and concerns are noted in context. Recommendations include:

- A statewide independent broadband authority should be established to serve as a central point of contact for coordinated broadband deployment. Proposed legislation to establish a statewide broadband authority is currently in progress.
- Broadband deployment should be permanently funded as a line item appropriation in the Commonwealth's annual budget for the proposed broadband authority. A dedicated Broadband Fund should be established to fund broadband deployment and improvement. Other potential funding sources should also be explored.

- Competitive market conditions for deployment do not reach all areas of need. Consequently, providers should be given incentives to meet service objectives in areas of marketplace failure, but such incentives must be tied to verifiable standards and objective accountability.
- Any community-based organization, municipality, rural electric cooperative, commercial entity, or fixed wireless provider, should be eligible for state-supported loans and grants administered by the broadband authority. All entities should meet specified qualifications to be able to assure the authority of the feasibility of their proposals.
- In those areas where “last mile” connectivity is not a viable option for commercial entities, community-based networks, municipalities, and existing infrastructure entities, such as rural electric cooperatives should be encouraged to attempt to fill in the gaps.
- Efforts should continue to identify unserved and underserved areas, and priority of efforts to expand broadband deployment should focus on these areas first, and be technology-neutral, both in terms of existing technology and new and evolving technologies.
- Broadband deployment efforts should include considerations of affordability to consumers. As part of broadband deployment funding, a recipient of state funding should be required to provide some level of minimum service at a uniform price as a low-cost alternative for lower income subscribers. Further, all providers should be expected to meet the same standards of speed and access to services for lower income subscribers regardless of geographic location.
- Anchor institutions such as schools, postsecondary institutions, libraries, municipal offices, community facilities, etc., in unserved and underserved areas should have a minimum high-speed level of wired services.
- The definition of broadband should provide for Internet speeds more consistent with currently technological capabilities and needs, as well as contain a mechanism by which minimum speeds can be adjusted as technology evolves. The consensus of most of the advisory committee members is that the definition of broadband should be consistent with the FCC standard. Additionally, all entities that receive state funds to deploy broadband should be subject to the same speed standards.

The full report is available on our website <http://jsg.legis.state.pa.us/>