

HOUSE BILL NO. 876

INTRODUCED BY K. KORTUM, J. ELLSWORTH

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A BILL FOR AN ACT ENTITLED: "AN ACT CREATING THE MONTANA BROADBAND COORDINATOR POSITION; PROVIDING AN APPROPRIATION; AND PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE AND A TERMINATION DATE."

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MONTANA:

NEW SECTION. **Section 1. Montana broadband coordinator.** (1) There is a broadband coordinator within the governor's office of economic development.

(2) The duties of the broadband coordinator are as follows:

(a) to examine the role of the Montana universal service fund in bringing comparable and affordable broadband service to rural residents and make recommendations to the public service commission and the legislature;

(b) to create detailed maps of broadband coverage and speeds in order to accurately pinpoint remaining gaps in broadband availability in the state;

(c) to survey other states and make recommendations on the definitions of the terms "unserved", "underserved", and "low-service area" for the discussion of broadband in Montana;

(d) to survey other states and make recommendations regarding minimum broadband speed standards in Montana;

(e) to identify opportunities and potential funding sources to expand broadband infrastructure and increase statewide access to broadband services. Funding sources may include but are not limited to federal grants.

(f) to survey broadband efforts in other states, especially rural efforts, and make recommendations to the governor and the legislature;

(g) to identify barriers to residential and commercial broadband deployment in unserved areas;

(h) to identify and review new communication technologies or alternative communication

1 technologies that may help serve rural communities;

2 (i) to research and make recommendations for specific eligibility criteria and application
3 requirements for any grant program developed using state funds. These eligibility criteria and application
4 requirements must be developed after hearing from all stakeholders and provide greater weight to applicants
5 that shall provide internet service to unserved homes, followed by underserved homes.

6 (j) to identify grant-matching opportunities that may be required for local governments to receive
7 federal broadband grants;

8 (k) to identify and help coordinate public-private partnership opportunities;

9 (l) to coordinate and assist with an interim study of broadband service;

10 (m) to coordinate broadband efforts among various stakeholder groups, including agency efforts
11 and tribal efforts;

12 (n) to perform any additional duties authorized by the legislature; and

13 (o) to draft a plan based on recommendations related to the above considerations and present that
14 plan to the legislature and the governor prior to January 1, 2025.

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16 **NEW SECTION. Section 2. Appropriation.** (1) There is appropriated \$750,000 from the state
17 general fund to the department of commerce for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024, for the purposes
18 described in [section 1].

19 (2) The appropriation must be used to pay for the salary of the broadband coordinator and to
20 complete the research and studies as provided in [section 1].

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22 **NEW SECTION. Section 3. Codification instruction.** [Section 1] is intended to be codified as an
23 integral part of Title 2, chapter 15, and the provisions of Title 2, chapter 15, apply to [section 1].

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25 **NEW SECTION. Section 4. Effective date.** [This act] is effective July 1, 2023.

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27 **NEW SECTION. Section 5. Termination.** [Section 1] terminates December 31, 2028.

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