



Montana Library Association

From the Mountains to the Prairies



2021 Legislative Session

LEGISLATIVE PACKET

Montana State Library

Montana Library Association

LC 2877

Short Title: Study broadband needs and solutions for the State of
Montana

Date: 12/15/2020

Senator Pat Flowers

Sponsor

Contact Information

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Whereas, access to broadband internet is necessary to participate in many facets of daily life including the need to learn online, to apply for jobs, to work remotely, and to communicate with medical providers; and,

Whereas, telecommunication providers in Montana continue to invest significant resources to deploy broadband infrastructure in our state; and,

Whereas, many stakeholders work collaboratively to address broadband internet needs in Montana; and,

Whereas, the federal government makes millions of dollars available for broadband deployment that Montana could better leverage; and

Whereas, despite this good work, access to broadband internet is limited or unavailable in many areas of Montana; and

Whereas, the cost of broadband internet may not be affordable to many Montanans; and

Whereas, the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the critical importance of broadband internet to every sector of Montana and the significance of the digital divide that exists between those Montanans who have access to broadband internet, and those who do not; and

Whereas, opportunities to grow the economy of the State of Montana and to compete with nationally in a variety of economic sectors are negatively impacted by the lack of broadband internet; and

Whereas, opportunities to support 21st century learning and information services are negatively impacted by the lack of broadband internet; and

Whereas, opportunities for local governments and state government to engage citizens online are negatively impacted by the lack of broadband internet; and

Whereas, the challenges that result in the digital divide extend beyond questions of physical access to broadband internet and include concerns of affordability, access to internet ready devices, and the need for improved digital literacy skills.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE AND THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF MONTANA: that the Legislative Council be requested to designate an appropriate interim committee, to:

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- 1) evaluate existing data with regard to the availability of, access to, and utilization of broadband internet, and the gaps the data reveals;

- 2) develop consensus for Montana's broadband goals;
- 3) consider models for broadband oversight and legislation to ensure Montana achieves its broadband goals;
- 4) encourage opportunities for public/private partnerships to maximize private sector investment to support broadband deployment;
- 5) understand the costs associated with adequate broadband investment and opportunities to leverage existing funding sources;
- 6) ensure that Montanans fully realize the potentials afforded to them through a robust broadband internet infrastructure and digital access and literacy initiatives;
- 7) solicit and consider comments, concerns, and suggestions from all interested stakeholder groups, including but not limited to the Montana Library Association, the Office of Public Instruction, the Commission of Higher Education, Montana wired and wireless providers, the Montana Economic Developers Association, tribes, counties, cities and towns, school districts, transportation, hospitals and healthcare, public safety, and infrastructure sectors, and the Montana Chamber of Commerce;
- 8) if appropriate, develop a committee bill to propose legislation to provide solutions that address the broadband internet access and broadband internet adoption, needs of the State of Montana

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that all aspects of the study be concluded prior to September 15, 2022.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the final results of the study, including any findings, conclusions, comments, or recommendations of the appropriate committee, be reported to the 68th Legislature.

Executive Summary

Short Title: Study broadband needs and solutions for the State of Montana

1. **Synopsis:** Lack of adequate broadband is a significant barrier to Montana’s current economy, and educational system, and if left unresolved, will stymie future growth for our State. If successfully passed and prioritized, this legislation would result in a study that would concretely assess and address the broadband needs for Montana.
2. **Fiscal Impact:** Yes No Uncertain
3. **Opposition Expected:** Yes No Uncertain

Interest Group	Position	Comments
Montana Library Association	Support	
Montana Economic Developers Association	Support	
Montana Telecommunications Association	Support	Appropriate fall back bill if policy legislation does not pass.
AT&T	Support	
Charter Spectrum	Support	
Office of Public Instruction	Uncertain	
Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education	Uncertain	
Montana Association of Counties	Support	
League of Cities and Towns	Support	
School Administrators of Montana	Support	Also seeking policy legislation this session
Tribal representatives	Uncertain	
Montana Rural Education Association	Support	

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