

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY

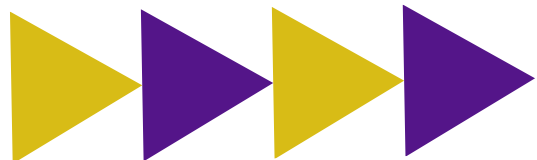
BROADBAND



B R O A D B A N D

Broadband is a critical component for vitality in rural communities. Sufficient internet leads to prosperity during hardships, such as the recent global pandemic, because of continued access to education, commerce, healthcare, precision agriculture, and much more. Communities become more attractive with access to fiber optic internet allowing for economic development opportunities to emerge and the community to make and maintain money locally. Yet, as of January 2022, Missouri ranks 32nd in state broadband access, which is still a critical issue for rural Northwest Missouri areas.

This year, Missouri is projected to deploy almost \$500 million dollars in state and federal funding for broadband expansion in unserved and underserved communities. Lawmakers must ensure that this unprecedented amount is invested wisely in future-proofing solutions that are affordable for rural homes and businesses.



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WHY IS THIS A PRIORITY?

- For unserved rural areas, the pandemic was a catalyst for defining the correlation between community vitality and broadband accessibility. We learned first-hand the importance of broadband as schools transitioned to remote learning, sick and elderly depended on telehealth, and small businesses temporarily closed their storefront and shifted to e-commerce.
- Broadband accessibility allows for greater innovation. Internet providers will be dependent on robust and scalable networks to meet growing consumer needs.
- Access to broadband creates opportunities within workforce development, economic development, and sustainable community development.
- Fiber connectivity allows exponential possibilities through its scalability enabling communities to grow with the network, not out of it.
- Deploying quality broadband connections in northwest rural Missouri is extremely expensive; with costs averaging between \$30-40k per mile. Legislative assistance is imperative to deploy the needed infrastructure.

HOW TO HELP

- Provide aid to qualified, local internet providers deploying broadband access in unserved/underserved rural areas.
- Approve funding to expand broadband through ARPA and BEAD.
- Provide grant opportunities with minimal matching requirements so providers have an increased possibility of reaching every acre.
- Support HB 1488 (Rep. Jeff Porter) which restricts disbursement of funds to unserved and underserved area and creates a challenge process that maximizes internet access for all areas of Missouri.
- Ensure future-proofing technology is used in broadband deployment.
- Support SB 981 (Sen. Denny Hoskins) which sets the definition of unserved areas at <25/3 Mb and underserved at <100/20 Mb (previously 10/1Mb and 25/3Mb respectively).
- Use a weighting system in funding requests that puts high priority on 100Mb symmetrical service (or higher).
- Improve broadband adoption efforts in rural households.
- Review Missouri Lifeline for broadband discount considerations. Add broadband to the state Lifeline discount to provide additional assistance to qualifying demographics and aid in higher broadband adoption rates.

