



For Immediate Release

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Bill Establishing Office of Broadband Heads to the Governor

SANTA FE — Today, Senate Bill 93, the Broadband Access & Expansion Act, passed the House of Representatives on a vote of 61-4. It now heads to the governor's desk to be signed into law.

"The creation of the Office of Broadband Access and Expansion will bring extreme focus to our Broadband challenges and could generate over \$970M in federal funding for our state," said bill sponsor and broadband champion Senator Michael Padilla (D-Albuquerque). "This office will ensure consistency across the continuum of how we deliver Broadband across our state, including some of the hardest to reach areas."

The establishment of the Office of Broadband Access and Expansion will be a cornerstone of the state's efforts to build out broadband infrastructure and services. As the COVID-19 pandemic laid bare disparities in connectivity for many communities across the state, broadband expansion was identified as a key legislative priority for the 2021 session. Currently New Mexico ranks as 49th-best-connected state in the country. And more than 20% of students in New Mexico public schools live in households without internet.

The new Office of Broadband Access and Expansion will:

- Produce a documented NM Broadband Plan, including a financial plan;
- Manage state-wide bulk pricing agreements;
- Produce and keep current the official New Mexico Broadband Map, as it relates to the FCC, USDA, etc. requirements;
- Negotiate Rights of Way and Easement access, and be the central repository for all Rights of Way and Easements related to Broadband;
- Produce reporting and analysis of the state of broadband in NM to the people of NM, Legislature and Governor;

- Employ 3-5 specialists that will work with other political subdivisions to design, develop, fund, and implement their broadband plans;
- Leverage NM investment dollars with other funding sources.

“This giant step forward will put New Mexico ahead of other states in critical economic development, distance learning and telehealth delivery to our citizens,” concluded Senator Padilla.

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