

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5120

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Water, Energy & Telecommunications, February 23, 2007

Title: An act relating to requiring a survey on the deployment of broadband technologies among households in the state.

Brief Description: Requiring a survey of the deployment of broadband technologies among households in the state to encourage cost-effectiveness and identify factors preventing widespread availability.

Sponsors: Senators Kohl-Welles, Poulsen, Rockefeller, Schoesler, Brown, Delvin, Hatfield and Kilmer.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Water, Energy & Telecommunications: 2/20/07, 2/23/07 [DP-WM].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WATER, ENERGY & TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Poulsen, Chair; Rockefeller, Vice Chair; Honeyford, Ranking Minority Member; Delvin, Fraser, Holmquist, Marr, Morton, Oemig, Pridemore and Regala.

Staff: William Bridges (786-7424)

Background: The term "broadband" generally refers to the high-speed transmission of electronic information. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) defines "high-speed" as a transmission speed in excess of 200 kilobits per second in at least one direction.

U.S. Broadband Surveys: According to a 2006 survey by the U.S. Government Accountability Office, households in rural areas are less likely to subscribe to broadband service than households in urban and suburban areas. This finding is consistent with other surveys. For example, the Pew Internet & American Life Project recently concluded that 24 percent of rural households had high-speed internet connections compared with 39 percent for urban and suburban households. One consequence of this disparity is that rural households use the internet less frequently on average than urban and suburban dwellers. The Pew data also shows racial and socio-economic disparities in broadband usage.

Governor's Broadband Study & Grant Program: In January 2007, the Governor announced The Next Washington strategy that, among other things, recommends expanding telecommunications access to those areas where it is not currently available or affordable. Accordingly, the Governor's budget appropriates \$100,000 for "a study to determine gaps in

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broadband access and to assess which areas could benefit from a telecommuting and e-business economic strategy." In addition, the Governor's capital budget appropriates \$5 million for a grant program, administered by the Department of Community, Trade, and Economic Development (CTED), to fund broadband capacity in remote jurisdictions of the state.

Summary of Bill: Requiring a Survey of Broadband Deployment: CTED must commission a survey on the deployment of broadband technologies among households in the state. The survey must be conducted by an appropriate entity having expertise in the access and utilization of modern information technologies among underserved populations.

Survey Criteria: The survey must collect and interpret statistically reliable geographic, demographic, and telecommunications technology information to identify any broadband deployment disparities in the state. The survey must also produce a statistically reliable profile of the following:

- households and businesses in the state with no available broadband options;
- households and businesses in the state with access to broadband options, but who choose not to purchase an option; and
- purposes for which broadband is used by households and businesses in the state.

Report to the Legislature: The survey is due by December 31, 2007, and must be presented to the appropriate committees of the Legislature having jurisdiction over telecommunications issues. The study may be presented in an electronic form.

Definitions: Various terms are defined. "Broadband" means any transmission technology capable of speeds in excess of 200 kilobits per second in at least one direction. "Geographic information" includes postal zip code groupings representative of the diverse populations of the state.

Findings and Intent: Various findings are made, including that broadband technologies play a fundamental role in the state's economy, are essential for electronic commerce and telecommuting, and are critical for twenty-first century learning and medicine. In addition, the Legislature intends to identify factors preventing the widespread availability and use of broadband technologies.

Public Disclosure Exemption: The names and identification data of any person, household, or business participating in the broadband survey are exempt from the Public Disclosure Act.

Appropriation: \$160,000, or as much thereof as may be necessary, is appropriated for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2008.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: The survey will reveal broadband disparities in rural and low-income areas. The bill builds on the ground-breaking work of the K-20 network. The U.S. has fallen from 4th place in 2001 to its current 15th place for broadband

deployment. The top countries, like Korea, Singapore, and Japan, have all used governmental initiatives to increase broadband. The survey must go beyond the Governor's narrow goals of assisting telecommuting. The survey also needs to focus on cultural, ethnic, and racial data. The current data on broadband deployment is poor. There is a need to examine why some persons do not subscribe to broadband even if it is available. The definition of broadband needs to be higher than the FCC definition. Raw data should be made available to the public. An advising committee should develop the survey design.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Kohl-Welles, prime sponsor; Bill Gillis, Washington State University Center to bridge the Digital Divide; Bart Preecs; Michael Weisman, Reclaim the Media.