
Capital Budget Committee

ESSB 5357

Brief Description: Establishing the capital broadband investment acceleration program.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Honeyford, King, Wagoner, Wellman and Wilson, L.).

Brief Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill

- Creates to Broadband Investment Acceleration Program in the Washington Statewide Broadband Office.
- Requires the Washington Statewide Broadband Office to develop a project evaluation process to assist in coordination among state broadband infrastructure funders to maximize federal funding opportunities.

Hearing Date: 3/16/21

Staff: Richelle Geiger (786-7139).

Background:

Washington Statewide Broadband Office.

The Washington Statewide Broadband Office was established within the Department of Commerce (Commerce) in 2019 to encourage, foster, develop, and improve affordable, quality broadband within the state. The Washington Statewide Broadband Office's duties and powers include; serving as the central broadband planning body for the State and developing, recommending, and implementing a statewide plan to encourage cost-effective broadband access and to make recommendations for increased usage, particularly in rural and other underserved areas.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Broadband grant and loan programs.

Currently, two broadband grant and loan programs operate within Commerce: the Public Works Board (PWB) Broadband Grant and Loan Program and the Community Economic and Revitalization Board (CERB) Rural Broadband Infrastructure Program. Eligible applicants for both programs include local governmental entities and federally recognized tribes.

The PWB Broadband Grant and Loan Program awards funding to promote expansion of broadband service in unserved areas of the state. Eligible applicants for the program include nonprofit organizations, limited liability corporations organized for the purpose of expanding broadband access, and incorporated businesses or partnerships. Applicants may apply for funding for construction projects that support broadband services and planning projects, including feasibility studies and network planning. Funding is awarded on a competitive basis.

The CERB Rural Broadband Infrastructure Program provides loan and grant packages to build broadband infrastructure in rural, underserved communities. Eligible construction projects include tower construction and fiber installation and expansion. Funding is provided to eligible applicants on a first come, first served basis.

Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill:

The Broadband Investment Acceleration Program is established in the Washington Statewide Broadband Office as a competitive grant program to increase broadband access to unserved areas of the state. Funding must be awarded as match funding that is required to participate in federal broadband infrastructure programs. Projects that serve distressed areas and rural counties must be prioritized for grant funding.

Eligible applicants include local governments, tribes, nonprofit organizations, cooperative associations, multiparty entities comprised of public entity members, limited liability corporations organized for the purpose of expanding broadband access, and incorporated businesses or partnerships.

No more than 3 percent of the funding appropriated to this program may be spent by the Washington Statewide Broadband Office for administration of the program. No more than 3 percent of each grant award may be spent by the grant recipient for management or administration of the grant.

The Washington Statewide Broadband Office is required to develop a project evaluation process to assist in coordination among state broadband infrastructure funders to maximize federal funding. The Washington Statewide Broadband Office, the Public Works Board, and the Community Economic Revitalization Board are encouraged to enter into a memorandum of understanding outlining how this coordination will take place.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on March 12, 2021.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.