GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA SESSION 2021

S SENATE BILL 523

Short Title:	Broadband Affordability Prog./Digital Equity.	(Public)
Sponsors:	Senators deViere, Chaudhuri, and Foushee (Primary Sponsors).	
Referred to:	Rules and Operations of the Senate	
	April 6, 2021	

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		April 6, 2021			
1		A BILL TO BE ENTITLED			
2	AN ACT TO	ESTABLISH THE NORTH CAROLINA BROADBAND ASSISTANCE			
3	PROGRAM	TO PROVIDE FUNDS TO ELIGIBLE LOW-INCOME FAMILIES TO HELP			
4	MAKE BRO	ADBAND ACCESS MORE AFFORDABLE.			
5	The General Ass	embly of North Carolina enacts:			
6	SECT	FION 1. As used in this act, the following definitions apply:			
7	(1)	Broadband service. – Defined in G.S. 143B-1374(a).			
8	(2)	Department. – The Department of Commerce.			
9	(3)	Low-income family. – A family unit with an annual household income that			
10		does not exceed one hundred thirty-five percent (135%) of the federal poverty			
11		level guidelines published by the United States Department of Health and			
12	CITE CIT	Human Services.			
13		FION 2.(a) The Department shall establish the North Carolina Broadband			
14	Assistance Program (Program) to ensure the affordability of broadband service to low-income				
15 16	families. The Department shall coordinate with county departments of social services to				
17	_	lity for low-income families for the Program, subject to the following Program			
18	parameters: (1)	Families with annual household income at or below one hundred percent			
19	(1)	(100%) of the federal poverty level are eligible for free broadband service.			
20	(2)	A credit of at least fifteen dollars (\$15.00) per month for broadband service is			
21	(=)	payable monthly to families meeting all of the following criteria:			
22		a. Families with annual household income above one hundred percent			
23		(100%), but no greater than one hundred thirty-five percent (135%) of			
24		the federal poverty level.			
25		b. Families that include at least one adult individual or dependent child			
26		who qualifies for or participates in at least one of the following			
27		programs:			
28		1. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.			
29		2. Supplemental Security Income Program.			
30		3. Veterans Pension and Survivors Benefits Programs.			
31		4. Federal Public Housing Assistance Program.			
32		5. National School Lunch Program.			
33		6. Medical Assistance Program under Part 6 of Article 2 of			
34 35	(2)	Chapter 108A of the General Statutes.			
35 36	(3)	Broadband service credits may be adjusted according to family size, as determined by the Department.			
30		determined by the Department.			



SECTION 2.(b) To be eligible for the Program, an applicant shall demonstrate, at least annually, income qualifications in a manner satisfactory to the Department. Additionally, Program recipients shall provide information to the Department sufficient to enable the Department to provide funds directly to the broadband service provider on behalf of the Program recipient. Program recipients shall be responsible for all charges not covered by Program funds and for all other obligations under any contract with a broadband service provider. The Department may terminate a Program recipient's eligibility for Program funds upon notification by the broadband service provider that the Program recipient's account is more than 45 days past due.

SECTION 2.(c) Beginning October 1, 2021, the Department of Commerce shall submit a quarterly report on the Broadband Assistance Program established in this act to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Agriculture and Natural and Economic Resources and the Fiscal Research Division. The report shall contain information detailing the following:

- (1) The number of families applying for the program.
- (2) The number of families that are determined to be eligible after applying.
- (3) The number of families participating in the program and the duration.
- (4) Any outreach activities undertaken by the Department or by any partner State agencies.
- (5) Any legislative recommendations relating to the Program.

SECTION 3. There is appropriated from the General Fund to the Department of Commerce the sum of two hundred fifty million dollars (\$250,000,000) in nonrecurring funds for the 2021-2022 fiscal year to be used for the North Carolina Broadband Assistance Program described in this act.

SECTION 4. This act becomes effective July 1, 2021.