



ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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HB 363 SPONSOR STATEMENT: BROADBAND: OFFICE, GRANTS, PARITY

“An Act establishing the office of broadband; creating the broadband parity adjustment fund; establishing the Statewide Broadband Advisory Board; and providing for an effective date.”

In anticipation of receiving an unprecedented level of federal funding for broadband grants in Alaska, House Bill 363 was introduced to enable the building out of modern middle and last mile infrastructure in all regions of the state while maintaining technological neutrality.

HB 363 establishes important guidelines for Alaska to qualify for nearly two billion dollars of broadband funds, while creating parity between urban and rural Alaska customers in a manner that allows for high speed, reliable internet services to be provided in an affordable and equitable manner.

This past May, Governor Dunleavy issued Administrative Order No. 322, to create a Task Force on Broadband to develop policy objectives and steps necessary to prepare Alaska for a massive infusion of money designed to move the state into the 21st century and create the opportunity for all communities, big or small, to do routine two-way video conferencing and take advantage of advanced telemedicine, education, public safety services, and economic development.

HB 363 seeks to codify the task force recommendations through the creation of the Office of Broadband in the Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development (DCCED), which will prioritize broadband service expansion in the following order of priority: **unserved areas, underserved areas, and anchor institutions**. The duties will include:

- Expand broadband access and digital equity in the state through federal and local partnerships
- Focus on broadband infrastructure projects that meet certain speed, latency, reliability, and scalability requirements, while maintaining neutrality within those requirements
- Develop a procedure for adoption of broadband service maps
- Identify scalable and sustainable technologies that meet the needs of state residents into the future
- Support broadband equity and affordability for all state residents
- Develop a procedure for the issuance of grants
- Review and consider recommendations of the Statewide Broadband Advisory Board (SBAB)

HB 363 also establishes the Broadband Parity Adjustment Fund (BPAF), which is a separate fund in the Alaska treasury, modeled after the Federal Communications Commission’s (FCC) Emergency Broadband Benefit. The BPAF is created with the express purpose of offsetting consumer costs and making grants to eligible beneficiaries to improve the performance and access to services where, in many instances, it does not currently exist.

Finally, HB 363 creates the Statewide Broadband Advisory Board to provide informed recommendations on broadband policy goals and objectives. The board will act in an advisory capacity to the Broadband Office to identify project proposals and develop criteria for mapping and data collection, while striving to fulfill the long list of recommendations that emerged from the extensive work of the Governor’s Task Force on Broadband.