

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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Senate Bill 234—Broadband: Office, Grants, Parity

Sponsor Statement

Senate Bill 234 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 at an affordable rate.

In May 2021, 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 large influx of money designed to move the state into the 21st century by significantly increasing and improving our broadband infrastructure.

SB 234 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)

SB 234 also establishes the Broadband Parity Adjustment Fund (BPAF), which is a separate fund in the Alaska treasury. 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.

Lastly, SB 234 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.