

Governor Ricketts Thanks Task Force for Recommendations to Improve Rural Broadband

(LINCOLN, NEB.) — Today, Governor Pete Ricketts announced Nebraska's Rural Broadband Task Force has submitted their recommendations to improve broadband availability and adoption in rural areas of the state to the Legislature. The report is due on November 1, every odd-numbered year.

"I appreciate the work of the task force," said Governor Ricketts. "Both rural and urban parts of the state need access to broadband to grow businesses and support farming. Broadband is also key to improving health care availability and expanding educational opportunities. By leveraging state and federal broadband programs that encourage public-private partnerships, we can improve broadband access in rural Nebraska."

"I would like to thank members of the Rural Broadband Task Force for their contributions," said Ed Toner, Chief Information Officer for the State of Nebraska and Chair of the Rural Broadband Task Force. "Although there is no single solution to providing broadband to rural areas, emerging technologies—such as fixed wireless using mid-band spectrums, low Earth orbit satellites or TV white space—may offer a more cost-effective solution."

The task force recommends that the State:

- Leverage the FCC's Digital Opportunity Data Collection program, or an alternate broadband mapping program created through federal legislation, to improve Nebraska's broadband map.
- Encourage the Nebraska Public Service Commission to investigate using a state-run reverse auction to spur broadband build-out in rural areas.
- Support public-private partnerships by:
 - Encouraging local and regional broadband planning, including communications planning between telecommunications providers and public power districts and cooperatives.
 - Retaining the existing prohibition on retail provision of broadband service by public entities.
 - Exploring ways to make it easier for public entities to lease dark fiber.
 - Encouraging local governments to make their rights of way and permitting processes less burdensome for telecommunications providers.

- Increase the number of public libraries applying for E-Rate support.
- Encourage school districts, ESUs, public libraries, and communities to implement strategies such as Wi-Fi on buses or lending hotspot devices to reduce the number of students who lack internet access to do homework.

The 14-member task force was created by LB 994, which was passed 48-0-1 by the Legislature and signed by Governor Ricketts on April 17, 2018. The bill was introduced by Senator Curt Friesen, Chair of the Transportation and Telecommunications Committee. The task force's report to the Legislature is available at <https://ruralbroadband.nebraska.gov>.

Resources:

<https://ruralbroadband.nebraska.gov>

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