

2022 -- S 2568

LC004815

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2022

A N A C T

RELATING TO STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT

Introduced By: Senators Seveney, Pearson, Murray, Cano, and Zurier

Date Introduced: March 10, 2022

Referred To: Senate Commerce

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Title 42 of the General Laws entitled "STATE AFFAIRS AND
2 GOVERNMENT" is hereby amended by adding thereto the following chapter:

3 CHAPTER 162

4 SPENDING AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT FUNDS FOR BROADBAND

5 DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

6 **42-162-1. Definitions.**

7 As used in this chapter, the following words shall have the following meanings:

8 (1) "Broadband service" means any wireline or fixed wireless technology having the
9 capacity to transmit data from or to the Internet at minimum speeds of at least twenty-five megabits
10 per second (25 Mbps) downstream and three megabits per second (3 Mbps) upstream.

11 (2) "Broadband coordinator" or "coordinator" means the broadband coordinator designated
12 pursuant to the provisions of § 42-162-2.

13 (3) "Broadband council" or "council" means the broadband council established pursuant to
14 the provisions of § 42-162-3.

15 (4) "Digital literacy" means the ability to use information and communication technologies
16 to find, evaluate, create and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills;

17 (5) "Underserved" means a geographic area of the state in which there is no provider of
18 broadband Internet service that offers dedicated Internet access with a capacity for transmission at
19 a consistent speed of at least one hundred megabits per second (100 Mbps) downstream and at least

1 twenty-five megabits per second (25 Mbps) upstream and does not qualify as “unserved” as defined
2 herein.

3 (6) "Unserved" means a geographic area of the state in which there is no provider of
4 broadband Internet service that offers dedicated Internet access with a capacity for transmission at
5 a consistent speed of at least twenty-five megabits per second (25 Mbps) downstream and at least
6 three megabits per second (3 Mbps) upstream.

7 **42-162-2. Broadband coordinator.**

8 An employee of the Rhode Island commerce corporation (Commerce RI) shall be
9 designated by the secretary of commerce as the broadband coordinator. The broadband coordinator
10 shall be responsible for connecting and communicating with the National Telecommunications and
11 Information Administration (NTIA) and other federal agencies to access federal funds to close the
12 digital divide in Rhode Island by promoting broadband infrastructure deployment to underserved
13 and unserved locations, facilitating broadband service adoption, expanding digital literacy for
14 residents experiencing economic hardship, and for future economic development. The broadband
15 coordinator shall meet no less than quarterly with the broadband council. The broadband
16 coordinator shall perform such other duties as assigned by the secretary.

17 **42-162-3. Broadband council established.**

18 (a) There is hereby established a broadband council for the purpose of performing the
19 duties enumerated in § 42-162-4.

20 (b) The council shall consist of the following nine (9) members:

21 (1) Rhode Island emergency management administrator, or designee.

22 (2) Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns administrator, or designee.

23 (3) Department of the public utilities commission administrator, or designee.

24 (4) Rhode Island infrastructure bank administrator, or designee.

25 (5) Providence Chamber of Commerce administrator, or designee.

26 (6) Northern RI Chamber of Commerce administrator, or designee.

27 (7) Telecommunications expert appointed by the governor.

28 (8) An individual or organizational representative serving underrepresented populations in
29 the state appointed by the senate president.

30 (9) An individual or organizational representative serving underrepresented populations in
31 the state appointed by the speaker of the house.

32 (c) Members of the council shall designate a chairperson.

33 (d) Members of the council shall serve without compensation.

34 (e) Vacancies shall be appointed in the same manner as the original appointment.

1 **42-162-4. Duties and powers of broadband council.**

2 (a) The council, in the performance of its duties, assist, advise and enable the broadband
3 coordinator to create a strategic plan that has goals and strategies for utilizing federal funds to
4 bridge the remaining digital divide in Rhode Island and increase the adoption of broadband Internet
5 service in the state. The plan shall include recommendations for funds to be used to:

6 (1) Facilitate targeted high-speed broadband infrastructure projects in underserved and
7 unserved locations through competitive requests for proposals that require the winning bidder to
8 contribute at least twenty percent (20%) private investment in the network construction;

9 (2) Provide subsidized computing devices, Internet service plan support, including in-home
10 equipment, and digital literacy services to targeted populations experiencing economic hardship
11 including, but not limited to, persons eligible for the temporary assistance for needy families
12 program, the federal supplemental nutrition assistance program, the federal communications
13 commission's emergency broadband benefit program, the federal communications commission's
14 lifeline program, and those whose household includes a child who is eligible for free or reduced
15 price lunch;

16 (3) Provide information and advice to increase education, awareness, training, access,
17 equipment, and support about available broadband adoption programs to libraries, schools, colleges
18 and universities, health care providers, and community support organizations;

19 (4) In consultation with the governor's workforce board, develop a recommended statewide
20 curriculum for advanced digital skills training to establish a talent pipeline matching job seekers
21 and historically underrepresented populations and Rhode Island employers.

22 (b) The council shall work in collaboration with the commerce corporation and other quasi-
23 public and nonprofit entities and state agencies, and may provide advisory assistance to local
24 entities, local authorities, public bodies and private corporations for the purposes of maximizing
25 opportunities for the expansion of broadband access for remaining unserved locations and
26 underserved locations and adoption of broadband service in the state.

27 **42-162-5. Funding.**

28 In addition to any appropriations by the state to include funds from the American Rescue
29 Plan Act, Pub. Law. 11-7-2 (2021) for the council to perform its duties, the broadband coordinator,
30 shall apply for and accept any available federal funds or grants to perform the functions of this
31 chapter. The broadband council may identify and recommend funding sources and grants to the
32 broadband coordinator.

33 **42-162-6. Administrative support to council.**

34 The broadband council shall be administratively attached to the Rhode Island commerce

1 [corporation established pursuant to chapter 64 of title 42. The Rhode Island commerce corporation](#)
2 [shall be responsible for providing support services to the council.](#)

3 **42-162-7. Meetings and reporting.**

4 [The council shall meet at least quarterly and shall report at least quarterly to the general](#)
5 [assembly on its findings and recommendations to include, but not be limited to, recommendations](#)
6 [for proposed legislation to further the purposes of this chapter.](#)

7 SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF
A N A C T
RELATING TO STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT

1 This act would establish a development program to increase and administer the adoption
2 of broadband services for local and statewide entities, both public and private, to be funded by the
3 spending of America Rescue Plan Act funds.

4 This act would take effect upon passage.

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