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P.L. 2020, Joint Resolution No. 1, ***approved March 20, 2020***
Assembly Joint Resolution No. 158

A JOINT RESOLUTION urging the Federal Communications Commission to take temporary measures to secure broadband access for those affected by the COVID-19 public health emergency.

WHEREAS, On January 31, 2020, the United States Secretary of Health and Human Services declared the outbreak of a novel coronavirus, abbreviated as COVID-19, as a public health emergency for the United States; and

WHEREAS, Early research of COVID-19 indicates that the virus is more contagious than the seasonal flu, SARS, and MERS; and

WHEREAS, In efforts to contain the spread of COVID-19, the United States Center for Disease Control recommended the practice of social distancing, which entails avoiding mass gatherings, and quarantine, if an individual might have been exposed; and

WHEREAS, In order to practice social distancing, many schools and businesses have closed, cancelled mass gatherings, and have opted to continue operations remotely via the Internet; and

WHEREAS, Telemedicine services, accessed through the Internet, are vital to the COVID-19 public health emergency response because hospital-acquired infections dissuade in-person visits, healthcare systems reach capacity, and quarantines prevent certain individuals from physically accessing healthcare facilities; and

WHEREAS, A 2019 Pew Research Center survey found that only 73 percent of American adults had high-speed Internet access at home and this figure was even lower in rural areas and low-income areas; and

WHEREAS, This public health emergency has exposed the digital divide in America, making it difficult for rural and low-income areas to access medical care, continue education, and maintain employment; and

WHEREAS, Under section 254 of the federal "Communications Act of 1954," the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) can secure universal broadband access for those affected by COVID-19 by taking temporary measures, such as approving experimental licenses to expand wireless networks, applying funds to boost connectivity in areas of need, and urging carriers to launch mobile cell towers; and

WHEREAS, The FCC has taken similar temporary measures in the wake of Hurricane Katrina by enabling rural and non-rural health care providers to apply for advanced telecommunications and information services; and

WHEREAS, The closing of schools and businesses and the challenges of accessing in-person healthcare during this crisis has the potential

to exacerbate geographic and income inequality in this country and can be addressed by taking emergency measures that secure broadband access for areas in need; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:*

1. The Governor and the Legislature of the State of New Jersey urge the Federal Communications Commission to take temporary measures to secure broadband access for those affected by the COVID-19 public health emergency.

2. Copies of this resolution, as filed with the Secretary of State, shall be transmitted by the Clerk of the General Assembly or the Secretary of the Senate to the President of the United States, the Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, and each Commissioner of the Federal Communication Commission

3. This joint resolution shall take effect immediately.

STATEMENT

This joint resolution urges the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to take temporary measures to secure broadband access for those affected by the COVID-19 public health emergency. On January 31, 2020, the United States Health and Human services Secretary declared the outbreak of a novel coronavirus, abbreviated as COVID-19, as a public health emergency in the United States. On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared the outbreak of COVID-19 as a pandemic. Early research indicates that COVID-19 is more contagious than the seasonal flu, SARS, and MERS and the United States Center for Disease Control recommends that people should exercise social distancing, which entails avoiding mass gathering, and quarantine, if an individual might have been exposed.

In order to practice social distancing, many schools and business have closed and cancelled mass gatherings, opting to continue operations remotely via the internet. Telemedicine services, accessed through the internet, are also vital to the COVID-19 response, as hospital-acquired infections dissuade in-person visits, traditional healthcare systems reach capacity, and quarantines prevent certain individuals from physically accessing healthcare facilities.

However, only 73 percent of American adults have access to high-speed internet and the estimates are even lower among rural and low-income areas. This makes it especially difficult for populations in rural and low-income areas to access medical care,

continue education, and maintain employment during this public health emergency. The FCC is urged to secure universal broadband access by taking temporary measures, such as approving experimental licenses to expand wireless networks, applying funds to boost connectivity in areas of need, and urging private carriers to launch mobile cell towers. The FCC has taken similar measures in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. This public health emergency has the potential to exacerbate geographic and income inequality in this country and can be addressed by taking emergency measures that secure broadband access for areas in need.

Urges FCC to take temporary measures to secure broadband access for those affected by COVID-19.