SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION No. 70

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

219th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED FEBRUARY 13, 2020

Sponsored by:
Senator STEVEN V. OROHO
District 24 (Morris, Sussex and Warren)

SYNOPSIS

Urges BPU to investigate broadband Internet and landline telephone services in State's rural communities; urges State Board of Agriculture and Department of Agriculture to explore ways these services can be brought to State's rural communities.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.

A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION urging the Board of Public Utilities to investigate the status of high-speed broadband Internet and landline telephone services in New Jersey's rural communities and urging the State Board of Agriculture and the Department of Agriculture to explore ways in which reliable high-speed broadband Internet and landline telephone services can be brought to New Jersey's rural communities.

WHEREAS, Today's modern farming operators are as likely to sell their agricultural products direct-to-the-public at on-farm locations as they are to sell them to wholesale brokers or directly to retailers; and

WHEREAS, An increasing number of New Jersey farm operators are incorporating agricultural tourism components on their farms to attract consumers to their farm property to either purchase products or partake in agricultural tourism events, which requires these farm operators to employ advertising over various forms of media; and

WHEREAS, Social media and other forms of advertising over the Internet have become increasingly popular ways to reach the exact type of consumers that are interested in agricultural tourism; and

WHEREAS, The ability to maximize Internet-based advertising depends, especially in rural areas where farms are concentrated, upon connecting to adequate high-speed broadband Internet and other broadband services; and

WHEREAS, Today's agricultural operations also rely on high-speed broadband Internet and other broadband services for many vital functions beyond advertising, such as remote sensing of field and greenhouse conditions, remote control of equipment, shipping and receiving control and coordination, obtaining current weather information that is critical to the application of crop inputs, and for numerous other purposes; and

WHEREAS, A lack of adequate broadband communications capability inhibits or precludes the use of these tools that can enhance a farm's efficiency and viability, thereby creating an inequity for farmers living in areas underserved by adequate telecommunications capability; and

WHEREAS, As technology continues to grow in importance to agriculture, the need for adequate high-speed broadband Internet and other broadband service capability will grow in importance to successful farming; and

WHEREAS, Rural areas of New Jersey have been especially underserved by broadband service from Internet service providers; and

WHEREAS, The lack of high speed broadband in rural areas of New Jersey negatively effects not only farmers but all residents, students, businesses, and governmental entities who reside or are located in rural areas and puts rural areas at a distinct disadvantage in attracting economic development; and

WHEREAS, The State Board of Agriculture has heard numerous complaints of diminished Internet, wireless, and landline service quality in rural areas of New Jersey; and

WHEREAS, The State Board of Agriculture has unanimously passed a resolution calling upon the Board of Public Utilities to investigate the status of high-speed Internet and landline telephone services in New Jersey's rural communities; and

WHEREAS, The United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Rural Development Office for New Jersey has informed the New Jersey Department of Agriculture (NJDA) that to help in addressing the lack of rural broadband Internet service in the State, the USDA needs guidance from the NJDA to create a mapping function that could help rural areas of New Jersey be eligible for grant programs offered by the USDA for broadband Internet service availability; and

WHEREAS, The State Board of Agriculture and the NJDA should explore ways in which adequate and reliable high-speed broadband Internet and landline telephone services can be brought to New Jersey's rural communities, so that the State's farmers, residents, students, businesses, and governmental entities who reside or are located in rural areas will be better positioned to maximize the overall use of technology to improve the efficiency and viability of their farms and communities while increasing economic development opportunities; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED *by the Senate of the State of New Jersey (the General Assembly concurring):*

1. The Board of Public Utilities is respectfully urged to conduct an investigation of the status of high-speed broadband Internet and landline telephone services in New Jersey's rural communities.

2. The State Board of Agriculture and the Department of Agriculture are respectfully urged to continue exploring ways in which adequate and reliable high-speed broadband Internet and landline telephone services can be brought to New Jersey's rural communities, so that the State's farmers, residents, students, businesses, and governmental entities who reside or are located in rural areas will be better positioned to maximize the overall use of technology to improve the efficiency and viability of their farms and communities while increasing economic development opportunities.

3. 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 each commissioner of the Board of Public Utilities, to each member of the State Board of Agriculture, and to the Secretary of Agriculture.

STATEMENT

This concurrent resolution urges the Board of Public Utilities (BPU) to conduct an investigation of the status of high-speed broadband Internet and landline telephone services in New Jersey's rural communities. Further, the concurrent resolution urges the State Board of Agriculture and the Department of Agriculture to continue exploring ways in which adequate and reliable high-speed broadband Internet and landline telephone services can be brought to New Jersey's rural communities, so that the State's farmers, residents, students, businesses, and governmental entities who reside or are located in rural areas will be better positioned to maximize the overall use of technology to improve the efficiency and viability of their farms and communities while increasing economic development opportunities.