

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION

No. 77

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

219th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED MARCH 16, 2020

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Senator Stack

SYNOPSIS

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

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.

(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 3/19/2020)

1 **A JOINT RESOLUTION** urging the Federal Communications
2 Commission to take temporary measures to secure broadband
3 access for those affected by the COVID-19 public health
4 emergency.
5
6 **WHEREAS**, On January 31, 2020, the United States Secretary of
7 Health and Human Services declared the outbreak of a novel
8 coronavirus, abbreviated as COVID-19, as a public health
9 emergency for the United States; and
10 **WHEREAS**, Early research of COVID-19 indicates that the virus is
11 more contagious than the seasonal flu, SARS, and MERS; and
12 **WHEREAS**, In efforts to contain the spread of COVID-19, the United
13 States Center for Disease Control recommended the practice of
14 social distancing, which entails avoiding mass gatherings, and
15 quarantine, if an individual might have been exposed; and
16 **WHEREAS**, In order to practice social distancing, many schools and
17 businesses have closed, cancelled mass gatherings, and have opted
18 to continue operations remotely via the Internet; and
19 **WHEREAS**, Telemedicine services, accessed through the Internet, are
20 vital to the COVID-19 public health emergency response because
21 hospital-acquired infections dissuade in-person visits, healthcare
22 systems reach capacity, and quarantines prevent certain individuals
23 from physically accessing healthcare facilities; and
24 **WHEREAS**, A 2019 Pew Research Center survey found that only 73
25 percent of American adults had high-speed Internet access at home
26 and this figure was even lower in rural areas and low-income areas;
27 and
28 **WHEREAS**, This public health emergency has exposed the digital
29 divide in America, making it difficult for rural and low-income
30 areas to access medical care, continue education, and maintain
31 employment; and
32 **WHEREAS**, Under section 254 of the federal “Communications Act of
33 1954,” the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) can secure
34 universal broadband access for those affected by COVID-19 by
35 taking temporary measures, such as approving experimental
36 licenses to expand wireless networks, applying funds to boost
37 connectivity in areas of need, and urging carriers to launch mobile
38 cell towers; and
39 **WHEREAS**, The FCC has taken similar temporary measures in the
40 wake of Hurricane Katrina by enabling rural and non-rural health
41 care providers to apply for advanced telecommunications and
42 information services; and
43 **WHEREAS**, The closing of schools and businesses and the challenges
44 of accessing in-person healthcare during this crisis has the potential
45 to exacerbate geographic and income inequality in this country and
46 can be addressed by taking emergency measures that secure
47 broadband access for areas in need; now, therefore,

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

3

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

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

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15 3. This joint resolution shall take effect immediately.

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STATEMENT

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

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

41 However, only 73 percent of American adults have access to
42 high-speed internet and the estimates are even lower among rural
43 and low-income areas. This makes it especially difficult for
44 populations in rural and low-income areas to access medical care,
45 continue education, and maintain employment during this public
46 health emergency. The FCC is urged to secure universal broadband
47 access by taking temporary measures, such as approving
48 experimental licenses to expand wireless networks, applying funds

1 to boost connectivity in areas of need, and urging private carriers to
2 launch mobile cell towers. The FCC has taken similar measures in
3 the wake of Hurricane Katrina. This public health emergency has
4 the potential to exacerbate geographic and income inequality in this
5 country and can be addressed by taking emergency measures that
6 secure broadband access for areas in need