

2021 SPECIAL SESSION I

INTRODUCED

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SENATE BILL NO. 1462

Offered January 21, 2021

A *BILL to amend the Code of Virginia by adding in Chapter 8 of Title 63.2 a section numbered 63.2-806, relating to Virginia Digital Equity Pilot Program and Fund.*

Patrons—Mason, Boysko and Lewis

Referred to Committee on Rehabilitation and Social Services

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That the Code of Virginia is amended by adding in Chapter 8 of Title 63.2 a section numbered 63.2-806 as follows:

§ 63.2-806. *Virginia Digital Equity Pilot Program.*

A. The General Assembly declares that it is the policy of this Commonwealth to ensure that every Virginian has reliable and affordable access to broadband. To this end, the Virginia Digital Equity Pilot Program (the Program) is hereby created to provide a fixed reimbursement, which shall not exceed \$15 monthly, for broadband service costs for select households currently participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. The total amount of the Program shall not exceed \$5 million annually. The Department is designated as the state agency responsible for administering the Program.

B. There is hereby created in the state treasury a special nonreverting fund to be known as the Virginia Digital Equity Pilot Program Fund, referred to in this section as "the Fund." The Fund shall be established on the books of the Comptroller. All funds appropriated for the Program shall be paid into the state treasury and credited to the Fund. Interest earned on moneys in the Fund shall remain in the Fund and be credited to it through the end of the Program. Any moneys remaining in the Fund after July 1, 2024, including interest thereon, shall revert to the general fund. Moneys in the Fund shall be used solely for the purposes set forth in this section. Up to 10 percent of moneys in the Fund may be used to pay the expenses of the Department of Social Services in administering the Program. Expenditures and disbursements from the Fund shall be made by the State Treasurer on warrants issued by the Comptroller upon written request signed by the Director of the Department of Social Services.

C. In administering the Program, it shall be the responsibility of the Department to:

1. Establish program guidelines in coordination with the Governor's Chief Broadband Advisor to govern eligibility for participation in the Program and disbursement of Program funds;

2. Administer disbursements from the Fund to Program participants;

3. Annually verify the broadband service plans of Program participants and assist Program participants in the selection of broadband service offerings, review of current broadband service, and utilization of existing low-cost programs from both private broadband providers and federal assistance programs;

4. Lead and facilitate meetings with the Department of Housing and Community Development, the Governor's Chief Broadband Advisor, and other designated private sector broadband stakeholders for the purpose of sharing information directed at alleviating the financial burden of broadband for participants and improving the effectiveness of the Program;

5. Collect and analyze data regarding the usage of broadband among Program participants and the economic impact of lessening broadband costs among low-income Virginians; and

6. Report to the Governor's Office and General Assembly before October 1, 2024, on the results and effectiveness of the Program in meeting the broadband needs of low-income Virginians.

D. As used in this section, "broadband" has the same meaning as provided in § 15.2-2403.

2. That the provisions of this act shall expire on July 1, 2024.

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