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More Oregon families should have access to broadband

SB 69: Bill helps Oregon's low-income families gain access to technology

SALEM – The Oregon Senate took a critical first step toward ensuring more Oregonians will have access to broadband Internet services.

[Senate Bill 69](#) – which passed today on the Senate floor – requires the Public Utility Commission to establish a plan to provide low-income Oregonians assistance for accessing broadband Internet services.

“For many years the state and federal government have helped low-incomes families get access to telephone service because it’s a necessity,” said Sen. Mark Hass, D-Beaverton, who carried the bill on the Senate floor. “It’s 2019 and the landscape looks completely different today than it did in 1994. Now, broadband Internet access is just as important to working class families as telephone service has been over the years, and so we need to update our laws to include it.”

Under the bill, the Public Utility Commission would include broadband Internet in the mix of services for which it must establish a low-income assistance plan. The PUC currently administers the joint state and federal Oregon Telephone Assistance Program, which provides reduced-cost phone and broadband Internet service to qualifying low-income households.

To qualify, a family must demonstrate its income or participate in government assistance programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. Oregon law currently requires the PUC to provide low-income assistance for phone service, but broadband subsidies are provided only with federal funds. Senate Bill 69 aligns Oregon with federal regulations,

which will increase the broadband discounts available to low-income families from \$9.25 to \$12.75 per month.

“Broadband access is a great way to level the field for all Oregonians,” Hass said. “Being able to access education, job opportunities and even work online is the way of today and it’s also the way of the future. By creating this opportunity for low-income, working families, we are giving many of them a hand up to greater opportunity.”

Senate Bill 69 now goes to the House of Representatives for consideration.

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