

Energy and Telecommunications Interim Committee
May 21, 2020

Comments of the Montana Telecommunications Association

Importance of Broadband is plainly illustrated

- Distance learning
- Telemedicine
- Remote work. (See relationship between broadband and GDP: <https://pcrd.purdue.edu/blog/remote-work-and-the-coronavirus.php>)

Demand has increased dramatically

- New POTS (voice) orders
- Bandwidth demand up between 10-50%
- Particularly *upstream* demand as two-way Internet activity dramatically has increased

What MTA members are doing to address CV-19 economic consequences (*at considerable expense and/or revenue loss, which eventually will affect financial stability*)

- FCC Pledge
 - Not terminate service to residential or small business customers b/c of pandemic
 - Waive late fees incurred as result of pandemic
 - Open WiFi hot spots for public use
- Additional CV 19 responses from MTA members
 - Connecting the disconnected—for free
 - Upgrading service, esp. for households with educators and/or students—for free
 - Donating devices to students to households with students
 - Opening hotspots wherever possible—for free
 - Waiving or discounting service to residential and small business customers
- Other FCC & Congressional initiatives. (<https://www.fcc.gov/coronavirus>)
 - Waived E-Rate gift rules enabling providers to cooperate with schools to deliver broadband and WiFi services directly
 - Waived rural health care gift rules, and expanded support to include devices and broadband connectivity
 - Expanded temporary access to spectrum

Looking Ahead

- Lessons learned
 - COVID has exposed the digital divide
 - Remote working
 - Education
 - Health care
 - We need a comprehensive federal/state/local strategy to close the digital divide and ensure that all Americans have access to *high-performance* broadband