

HCS HB 461 -- BROADBAND DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

SPONSOR: Riggs

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass with HCS" by the Standing Committee on Utilities by a vote of 8 to 0. Voted "Do Pass" by the Standing Committee on Rules- Administrative Oversight by a vote of 7 to 0.

The following is a summary of the House Committee Substitute for HB 461.

This bill establishes the "Broadband Development Council" consisting of 21 members including members from certain state agencies, members of the general public representing certain classifications of broadband users, and three members each from the Senate and the House of Representatives, with two from each chamber appointed by the President Pro Tem and the Speaker and one appointed by the Minority Floor Leader of each chamber. The public members of the Council will be appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives and serve terms as specified in the bill.

The responsibilities of the Council are specified in the bill and include exploring ways to expand access to broadband services; the potential for increased use of broadband for education, career readiness, workforce preparation, and alternative career training; ways to encourage state and municipal agencies to expand service to better serve the public through the use of streaming, voice over Internet protocol, teleconferencing, and wireless networking. The Council shall make recommendations to the General Assembly regarding strategies to make broadband available to certain communities and statutory changes needed to enhance broadband access in the state. The Council must submit a report to the General Assembly and the Governor on or before January 1 of each year summarizing the actions of the Council the previous year. The bill specifies the powers of the Council.

The Council must also establish a university-based research organization, or contract with an organization, that will annually survey each county and school district in the state to assess available internet speed and identify areas with challenges to high-speed internet access.

This bill is similar to HB 2638 (2022).

The following is a summary of the public testimony from the committee hearing. The testimony was based on the introduced version of the bill.

PROPONENTS: Supporters say that the state and federal governments have distributed millions of dollars in grant funds for the expansion of broadband throughout the state. This bill would establish a council to provide stakeholder engagement and legislative oversight to ensure the effective use of the funds.

Testifying in person for the bill were Representative Riggs; and Microsoft Corporation.

OPPONENTS: There was no opposition voiced to the committee.

Written testimony has been submitted for this bill. The full written testimony and witnesses testifying online can be found under Testimony on the bill page on the House website.