

# ASSEMBLY JOINT RESOLUTION

No. 158

## STATE OF NEW JERSEY

### 219th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED MARCH 16, 2020

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**Assemblywomen DiMaso, McKnight, Dunn, Lopez, Assemblymen Benson, Chiaravalloti, Assemblywoman Jasey, Assemblymen Wirths, Space, Assemblywoman Chaparro, Assemblyman Zwicker and 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:*

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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 gathering,  
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

**AJR158 DEANGELO, DEPHILLIPS**

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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.