

ASSEMBLY EDUCATION COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION No. 124

with committee amendments

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: MARCH 3, 1997

The Assembly Education Committee favorably reports Assembly Resolution No. 124 with committee amendments.

As amended by committee, this resolution urges the Board of Public Utilities to establish an Education Advisory Panel on Universal Service to make recommendations to the board on how it should design and implement universal service policies and regulations to best meet the educational needs of New Jersey's students and to expand access for schools, libraries, and colleges and universities to advanced telecommunications services.

The federal Telecommunications Act of 1996, Pub.L.104-104, defines "universal service" as an "evolving level of telecommunications services" periodically established by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). In defining universal service, the FCC is supposed to consider advances in telecommunications and information technologies and services. In addition, the federal act requires that all elementary and secondary schools, libraries, and rural health care providers receive telecommunications services at a discount. The discount is to be an amount that the FCC determines is appropriate and necessary to ensure affordable access to such services. The FCC is required to adopt final rules by May 1997 and also provides that states may adopt their own regulations to advance universal service goals in each state. The advisory panel suggested under this resolution would provide recommendations to the Board of Public Utilities concerning any rules, regulations, or policies which that board may adopt in relationship to universal service for schools and libraries in New Jersey.

The committee amended the resolution to provide that the recommendations made by the advisory panel would include recommendations concerning universal service to colleges and universities, to add a representative from both the New Jersey Council on Higher Education and the New Jersey Presidents' Council to the suggested membership of the panel, and to provide that the President of the Board of Public Utilities and the Ratepayer Advocate should participate on the panel as members as opposed to ex officio members. These amendments were made in light of the authority granted under the federal law allowing states to adopt their own regulations to advance the universal service goals in each state.