



HOUSE BILL 947: The G.R.E.A.T. Broadband Expansion Act.

2021-2022 General Assembly

Committee:	House Rules, Calendar, and Operations of the House	Date:	May 25, 2021
Introduced by:	Reps. Arp, Lambeth, Saine, Johnson	Prepared by:	Matthew Meinig
Analysis of:	Second Edition		Staff Attorney

OVERVIEW: *The bill (i) creates the Completing Access to Broadband Program (CAB) to supplement federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding received by counties with State ARPA funds to expand broadband infrastructure to unserved and underserved areas (ii) establishes a separate process to administer ARPA funds appropriated for broadband grants in the Growing Rural Economies with Access to Technology (GREAT) program, and (iii) makes various changes to the State-funded GREAT program.*

BILL ANALYSIS: The bill does the following:

- Section 1.1 creates the Completing Access to Broadband (CAB) program. Counties participating in the CAB program can identify unserved areas, in collaboration with the Broadband Infrastructure Office in the Department of Information Technology, that are eligible for program funding. Under the guidance of the Department, a county can initiate a bid process to select a broadband service provider for broadband infrastructure expansion into unserved and underserved areas. The county and the State would each be responsible for a portion of the project cost utilizing American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds.
- Section 2.1 establishes a separate American Rescue Plan Act GREAT process to administer ARPA funds appropriated to the GREAT program for broadband infrastructure grants. The process largely mirrors the provisions in G.S. 143B-1373, with the exception of scoring metrics adapted for (i) the use of county ARPA funds, (ii) heightened broadband download and upload speeds required by federal guidelines, and (iii) changes to certain matching requirements.
- Section 2.2 directs the Department of Information Technology to utilize a portion of funds allowed for administration of the American Rescue Plan Act GREAT program for legal and appraisal services to assist the Department of Administration in its review and disposition of requests for collocation, installation, and operation of equipment pursuant to G.S. 146-29.2(b1) for broadband providers participating in the American Rescue Plan Act GREAT program.
- Section 3.1 makes various changes to the GREAT program, including the following:
 - Changes to clarify that project area protection can be maintained for the duration of a project that is in good standing.
 - Changes to the protest period, including a reduction of the period to 20 days and detailing the eligibility of protests and the evidence and criteria used by the Department to evaluate a protest.
 - Changes to enable the Department to evaluate applications that utilize a partnership, and that clarify the types of partnerships that are eligible under the program.

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- Various changes to the scoring metrics, matching requirements, and grant thresholds.
- Section 4.1 appropriates \$350 million in ARPA funds to be used in the American Rescue Plan Act GREAT program established in Part II of the bill.
- Section 4.2 allows the Department to use up to 1.1% of ARPA funds for administration of the American Rescue Plan Act GREAT program.
- Section 4.3 expresses the intent of the General Assembly to appropriate ARPA funds in future legislation in the sum of \$400 million for the CAB program established in Part I of the bill.
- Section 5.1 directs the Office of Broadband Infrastructure to utilize the development tier status in the annual ranking performed by the Department of Commerce pursuant to G.S. 143B-437.08 for the 2020 calendar year through the 2024-2025 fiscal year to offset any disparate economic impacts the COVID-19 pandemic may have upon the tier rankings.

EFFECTIVE DATE: The act would become effective July 1, 2021.