



Senate

General Assembly

File No. 571

January Session, 2025

Substitute Senate Bill No. 514

Senate, April 8, 2025

The Committee on General Law reported through SEN. MARONEY of the 14th Dist., Chairperson of the Committee on the part of the Senate, that the substitute bill ought to pass.

AN ACT ESTABLISHING A NET EQUALITY PROGRAM.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

- 1 Section 1. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2025*) (a) As used in this section:
- 2 (1) "Affordable broadband Internet access service" means broadband
3 Internet access service that (A) costs not more than the amount
4 established in subsection (c) of this section, and (B) meets the minimum
5 speed requirements set forth in subsection (d) of this section;
- 6 (2) "Broadband Internet access service" (A) means a mass-market
7 retail service that, by wire or radio, provides the capability to transmit
8 data to, and receive data from, all or substantially all Internet endpoints,
9 including, but not limited to, any capability that is incidental to, and
10 enables the operation of, such service, (B) includes any service that is
11 provided to customers in this state and is functionally equivalent to the
12 service described in subparagraph (A) of this subdivision, and (C)
13 excludes (i) dial-up Internet access service, and (ii) any service that is
14 functionally equivalent to the service described in subparagraph (A) of

15 this subdivision but serves end users primarily by using mobile stations;

16 (3) "Broadband Internet access service provider" means any person
17 who provides broadband Internet access service in this state;

18 (4) "Eligible household" means (A) a resident of a group home or
19 congregate care facility that (i) is participating in a qualified public
20 assistance program, and (ii) is located within a qualified broadband
21 Internet access service provider's service territory in this state, and (B) a
22 household (i) in which at least one resident is participating in a qualified
23 public assistance program, and (ii) that is located within a qualified
24 broadband Internet access service provider's service territory in this
25 state;

26 (5) "Person" means an individual, corporation, business trust, estate
27 trust, partnership, association, joint venture or any other legal or
28 commercial entity;

29 (6) "Qualified broadband Internet access service provider" means a
30 broadband Internet access service provider that is doing business in this
31 state and with any state agency, including, but not limited to, through a
32 procurement contract;

33 (7) "Qualified public assistance program" means (A) the Connecticut
34 energy assistance program administered by the Department of Social
35 Services pursuant to the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Act of
36 1981, as amended from time to time, (B) the National School Lunch
37 Program established pursuant to the National School Lunch Act, 42 USC
38 1751 et seq., as amended from time to time, (C) the temporary assistance
39 for needy families program administered by the Department of Social
40 Services pursuant to the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity
41 Reconciliation Act of 1996, as amended from time to time, (D) the
42 supplemental nutrition assistance program administered by the
43 Department of Social Services pursuant to the Food and Nutrition Act
44 of 2008, as amended from time to time, (E) the Covered Connecticut
45 program established under section 19a-754c of the general statutes, (F)
46 HUSKY Health, as defined in section 17b-290 of the general statutes, (G)

47 the state supplement program to the federal Supplemental Security
48 Income Program administered by the Department of Social Services
49 pursuant to the Social Security Act, as amended from time to time, and
50 (H) any program providing need-based financial aid for post-secondary
51 education; and

52 (8) "State agency" has the same meaning as provided in section 1-79
53 of the general statutes.

54 (b) The Office of Consumer Counsel shall develop, establish and
55 administer a program that shall be known as the "Net Equality Program"
56 for the purposes set forth in this section. As part of said program:

57 (1) The Office of Consumer Counsel shall monitor progress toward
58 achieving the objectives set forth in subparagraph (C)(i) of subdivision
59 (2) of this subsection; and

60 (2) Each qualified broadband Internet access service provider shall:

61 (A) Beginning on October 1, 2025, allow any resident or household
62 described in subdivision (4) of subsection (a) of this section, during any
63 month in which such resident or household qualifies as an eligible
64 household, to immediately convert to affordable broadband Internet
65 access service provided by such qualified broadband Internet access
66 service provider;

67 (B) Not later than October 1, 2025, establish and maintain a telephone
68 number at which members of eligible households may contact trained
69 personnel to sign up for affordable broadband Internet access service
70 during the thirty-minute period immediately following the beginning
71 of a telephone call made to such telephone number;

72 (C) Not later than December 31, 2025, and annually thereafter, hold a
73 public meeting with key stakeholders to (i) ensure that (I) at least ninety
74 per cent of eligible households receive affordable broadband Internet
75 access service not later than January 1, 2026, and (II) at least ninety-five
76 per cent of eligible households receive affordable broadband Internet
77 access service not later than January 1, 2029, and (ii) explore options to

78 establish and advance strategic and effective public-private
79 partnerships;

80 (D) Not later than April 1, 2026, and annually thereafter, submit to
81 the Office of Consumer Counsel, in a form and manner prescribed by
82 said office, a report disclosing (i) the number of eligible households that
83 signed up for affordable broadband Internet access service provided by
84 such qualified broadband Internet access service provider during the
85 year that is the subject of the report, and (ii) the total number of eligible
86 households that received affordable broadband Internet access service
87 provided by such qualified broadband Internet access service provider
88 during the year that is the subject of such report; and

89 (E) (i) Beginning on October 1, 2025, advertise, in print and online, in
90 multiple languages and by placing advertisements with public and
91 nongovernmental organizations, the availability of (I) the affordable
92 broadband Internet access service provided by such qualified
93 broadband Internet access service provider in this state, and (II) the
94 "Affordable Connectivity Program" developed and implemented by the
95 Federal Communications Commission or an equivalent program
96 offered by said commission.

97 (ii) Each advertisement required under subparagraph (E)(i) of this
98 subdivision shall include the telephone number established and
99 maintained pursuant to subparagraph (B) of this subdivision.

100 (iii) Notwithstanding the provisions of subparagraph (E)(i) of this
101 subdivision, a qualified broadband Internet access service provider may
102 cease all advertisements required under said subparagraph if a
103 reputable state-wide survey demonstrates that (I) at least eighty per cent
104 of eligible households are aware that affordable broadband Internet
105 access service is available, or (II) at least ninety-five per cent of eligible
106 households are connected to the Internet at home.

107 (c) (1) Except as provided in subdivision (2) of this subsection, the
108 monthly cost charged by a qualified broadband Internet access service
109 provider to an eligible household for affordable broadband Internet

110 access service provided pursuant to this section shall not exceed forty
111 dollars.

112 (2) Not later than June 1, 2026, and annually thereafter, the Office of
113 Consumer Counsel shall adjust the maximum monthly cost that a
114 qualified broadband Internet access service provider may charge to an
115 eligible household for affordable broadband Internet access service
116 provided pursuant to this section during the twelve-month period
117 beginning on July first of the same calendar year in accordance with any
118 change in the consumer price index for all urban consumers for the
119 preceding calendar year, as published by the United States Department
120 of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

121 (d) (1) Except as provided in subdivisions (2) and (3) of this
122 subsection, all affordable broadband Internet access service provided
123 pursuant to this section shall provide:

124 (A) Speeds that are at least as fast as (i) one hundred megabits per
125 second downstream, and (ii) twenty megabits per second upstream; and

126 (B) Speeds and latencies that are sufficient to support distance
127 learning and telehealth services.

128 (2) Beginning on June 1, 2027, and not more frequently than
129 biennially thereafter, the Office of Consumer Counsel may, in
130 consultation with the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority, increase the
131 minimum speeds set forth in subparagraph (A) of subdivision (1) of this
132 subsection for the two-year period beginning on July first of the same
133 calendar year. The Office of Consumer Counsel and the Public Utilities
134 Regulatory Authority shall post such increased speeds on the Office of
135 Consumer Counsel's and Public Utilities Regulatory Authority's
136 Internet web sites.

137 (3) The Office of Consumer Counsel may authorize a deviation from
138 the requirements established in this subsection for the purpose of
139 complying with applicable state or federal law, except said office shall
140 not authorize any deviation from such requirements to allow any

141 affordable broadband Internet access service provided pursuant to this
 142 section to provide speeds that are slower than the speeds set forth in
 143 subparagraph (A) of subdivision (1) of this subsection or established by
 144 the Office of Consumer Counsel, in consultation with the Public Utilities
 145 Regulatory Authority, pursuant to subdivision (2) of this subsection,
 146 whichever speeds are faster.

147 (e) (1) Beginning on October 1, 2025, and except as provided in
 148 subdivision (2) of this subsection, no state agency shall do business, or
 149 enter into any procurement contract, with any broadband Internet
 150 access service provider that is doing business in this state unless such
 151 broadband Internet access service provider offers affordable broadband
 152 Internet access service to eligible households as required under this
 153 section.

154 (2) The provisions of subdivision (1) of this subsection shall not be
 155 construed to impair any contract that is in existence on October 1, 2025.

156 (f) The provisions of subsections (a) to (e), inclusive, of this section
 157 shall not be construed to apply to the Department of Emergency
 158 Services and Public Protection.

This act shall take effect as follows and shall amend the following sections:		
Section 1	July 1, 2025	New section

Statement of Legislative Commissioners:

In Subsec. (d)(3), "higher" was changed to "faster" for consistency.

GL *Joint Favorable Subst.*

The following Fiscal Impact Statement and Bill Analysis are prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and do not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose. In general, fiscal impacts are based upon a variety of informational sources, including the analyst's professional knowledge. Whenever applicable, agency data is consulted as part of the analysis, however final products do not necessarily reflect an assessment from any specific department.

OFA Fiscal Note

State Impact: None

Municipal Impact: None

Explanation

The bill requires the Office of Consumer Counsel (OCC) to develop and administer the Net Equality Program to provide affordable broadband Internet to eligible families receiving certain government assistance. This is not anticipated to result in a fiscal impact as OCC has the staff and expertise necessary to administer the program.

Rate Payer Impact

Broadband Internet access service providers are not regulated utilities, as their costs are driven by market dynamics rather than the cost-of-service regulations. Therefore, there is no direct rate payer impact associated with the bill.

The Out Years

State Impact: None

Municipal Impact: None

OLR Bill Analysis**sSB 514*****AN ACT ESTABLISHING A NET EQUALITY PROGRAM.*****SUMMARY**

This bill requires the Office of Consumer Counsel (OCC) to develop, establish, and administer the Net Equality Program to provide affordable broadband Internet to eligible families receiving certain government assistance. It generally limits the affordable broadband Internet access service (“affordable broadband”) maximum monthly charge to \$40 and requires the minimum speeds to be 100 megabits per second (Mbps) download speed and 20 Mbps upload speed.

Under the bill, OCC must monitor the progress towards achieving the goal of at least 90% of eligible households receiving affordable broadband by January 1, 2026, and at least 95% of them receiving it by January 1, 2029.

The bill generally prohibits state agencies, beginning October 1, 2025, from doing business, or entering procurement contracts, with a broadband Internet access service provider doing business in the state unless the provider offers affordable broadband to eligible households.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025

PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS AND DEFINITIONS

The bill requires each qualified broadband Internet access service provider (i.e. a provider that does business in the state and with any state agency), beginning on October 1, 2025, to allow eligible households to immediately convert to affordable broadband during any month in which the household qualifies for it.

A “broadband Internet access service provider” is any person (i.e.

individual or entity) that provides “broadband Internet access service” in Connecticut, which means a mass-market retail service that, by wire or radio, provides the capability to transmit and receive data to and from substantially all Internet endpoints, including any capability that is incidental to, and enables the operation of, the service. The service includes any service that is provided to Connecticut customers and is functionally equivalent to the mass-market retail service described above but does not include dial-up Internet access service, and any service that is functionally equivalent to the mass-market retail service above but serves end users primarily by using mobile stations (e.g., cell phones).

“Eligible household” means a (1) resident of a group home or congregate care facility that participates in a qualified public assistance program and (2) household in which at least one resident participates in a qualified public assistance program, that are in a qualified broadband Internet access service provider’s territory in the state.

“Qualified public assistance program” includes the following Department of Social Services-administered programs: Connecticut Energy Assistance program, temporary family assistance (TFA) and supplemental nutrition assistance (SNAP) programs, state supplemental security income program, Husky Health (e.g., Medicaid), and the Covered Connecticut health insurance program. It also includes the National School Lunch Program, and any program that provides need-based financial aid for post-secondary education.

The bill also requires providers to do the following by:

1. October 1, 2025, establish and maintain a telephone number that eligible households may use to contact trained personnel to sign up for affordable broadband within 30 minutes after the start of the call;
2. December 31, 2025, and then annually, hold a public meeting with key stakeholders to (a) explore options to establish and advance strategic and effective public-private partnerships and

- (b) ensure that at least 90% of eligible households receive affordable broadband by January 1, 2026, and at least 95% of them receive it by January 1, 2029;
3. April 1, 2026, and then annually, submit to OCC a report disclosing the (a) number of eligible households that signed up for affordable broadband from the provider during the reporting year and (b) total number of eligible households that received affordable broadband from the provider during the reporting year; and
 4. October 1, 2025, place advertisements with public and nongovernmental organizations, in print and online in multiple languages, about the availability of (a) affordable broadband from the provider and (b) the Federal Communication Commission's (FCC) Affordable Connectivity Program or an equivalent program the FCC offers.

Under the bill, these required advertisements must include the telephone number eligible households may use to contact trained personnel to sign up for affordable broadband within 30 minutes following the start of the call.

Additionally, the bill allows each qualified provider to stop the advertisements if a reputable statewide survey demonstrates that at least (1) 80% of eligible households are aware that affordable broadband is available or (2) 95% of eligible households are connected to the Internet at home.

MONTHLY PRICE

The bill generally limits a qualified broadband Internet access service provider's maximum monthly charge to an eligible household for affordable broadband Internet access service to \$40.

However, under the bill, starting by June 1, 2026, OCC must annually adjust the maximum monthly cost for the 12-month period starting July 1 of the same calendar year based on any change in the consumer price

index for all urban consumers for the preceding calendar year, as published by the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics.

SERVICE SPEEDS

Additionally, the bill requires that all affordable broadband provided under the bill's provisions provide, at minimum, 100 Mbps download speed and 20 Mbps upload speed. In all cases, service speeds and latency must be sufficient to support distance learning and telehealth services.

Beginning June 1, 2027, and then not more frequently than biennially, the bill allows OCC, in consultation with the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA), to increase the minimum speeds the affordable broadband plans must provide for the two-year period beginning July 1 of the same calendar year. OCC and PURA must post the increased speeds on their respective websites.

The bill allows OCC to approve a deviation from the service speed requirements to comply with applicable state or federal law. However, it prohibits the office from approving any deviation that would provide affordable broadband service speeds that are slower than 100 Mbps download and 20 Mbps upload speeds or those established by OCC and PURA, whichever speeds are higher.

CONDUCTING BUSINESS WITH STATE AGENCIES

The bill generally prohibits state agencies, beginning October 1, 2025, from doing business, or entering into procurement contracts, with a broadband Internet access service provider doing business in the state unless the provider offers affordable broadband to eligible households as required by the bill. Under the bill, "state agency" is any office; department; board; council; commission; institution; constituent unit of the state's higher education system; technical education and career school; or other executive, legislative, or judicial branch agency.

The bill states that it does not impair any contract that exists on October 1, 2025. Further, it exempts the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection from this restriction.

COMMITTEE ACTION

General Law Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 14 Nay 7 (03/21/2025)