



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jen Metzger

## Senator Metzger's Bill to Make Broadband More Accessible, Affordable, and Reliable Passes State Senate

JEN METZGER July 22, 2020

| ISSUE: **BROADBAND GAP, RURAL BROADBAND SERVICE, COMPREHENSIVE BROADBAND CONNECTIVITY ACT**



**Albany, NY...** Today State Senator Jen Metzger's bill addressing deficiencies in rural broadband service across New York State passed the Senate. Metzger's broadband legislation recognizes access to high-speed internet as a right of all New Yorkers and essential to economic and social well-being and public safety. The bill enjoys bipartisan support in the Senate, with 32 co-sponsors from both sides of the aisle, and would be an important step

toward closing the broadband gap once and for all in New York. Sean Ryan (AD-149) introduced the bill in the Assembly, where it passed yesterday.

The pandemic has brought renewed urgency to closing the broadband gap, magnifying the disadvantages of being without internet when it comes to school, work, healthcare, and daily living. Bill [S8805](#) (formerly S5696A) directs the Public Service Commission (PSC) to study the availability, affordability, and reliability of high-speed internet and broadband access in New York State and produce a detailed access map on its website that indicates internet service by location. The legislation also requires the PSC to hold a minimum of four regional public hearings across the State and submit a report on its findings to the Governor and legislature within one year to prioritize broadband access for communities that have experienced negative economic and social impacts due to absent or insufficient service.

"Long before COVID-19, lack of access to high-speed internet had limited economic and educational opportunities in rural districts like mine. If we want to ensure equal opportunity in today's world and chip away at the urban-rural and rich-poor gaps, then we need to make sure that every New Yorker has affordable access to broadband," **said Senator Metzger (SD-42)**. "This legislation requires that the PSC examine internet speeds, costs, and other factors that together affect broadband access so that we can fully close the digital divide in New York State, and I urge the Governor to sign it into law as soon as possible."

New studies by [Microsoft](#) and [BroadbandNow](#) indicate that broadband access data generated by internet service providers is not always collected accurately, and the Federal Communications Commission's method of collecting data at the census block level ends up missing many unserved households. The bill would require the Public Service Commission to collect data at a more granular level. Importantly, the bill also requires mapping of internet speeds, which affect whether many common internet uses, such as streaming and virtual meetings, can even be supported.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare, once again, the urgent need to close the digital divide in rural communities and invest in increased access to affordable high-speed broadband internet,” **said U.S. Congressman Antonio Delgado.** “We must treat broadband access as a utility, not a luxury, and address the root of the problem by working to correct the practices that have hindered broadband deployment, such as mapping, in New York communities for far too long. I will continue to be an active partner at the federal level, and push for policy changes that enable us to build reliable infrastructure throughout upstate.”

**Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins said,** “The COVID-19 pandemic has helped illustrate how the lack of high-speed internet access is holding back millions of New Yorkers all over our state. This is something that needs to be corrected and this bill is a step in the right direction. I want to commend Senator Jen Metzger who fought so hard for this bill.”

**District Superintendent of Sullivan BOCES Dr. Robert M. Dufour said,** "In these uncertain times when remote learning has become a mainstay of public education, the access to a stable, reliable, and affordable high-speed internet connection is an absolute necessity. In Sullivan County, there are major gaps in internet service and Senator Metzger’s bill is designed to directly address them. Depending on the school district between 8% and 20% of our students do not have access to the internet, and the current bandwidth provided by internet service providers is inadequate during peak times. During the recent closure of schools, it became evident that service county-wide slowed down during "school hours" as thousands of students attempted to log on at the same time. The infrastructure of the service providers is simply inadequate to cope with the demand. When ISPs do offer internet, the service is often prohibitively expensive, and I support Senator Metzger’s bill because it will not only ascertain service gaps, but the cost of residents' service as well. Cell service is also inadequate and a poor alternative to hard-wired internet service. With dead zones up and down the Route 97 river corridor and in the western portions of our county, the lack of cell service

throughout the entire county prohibits the use of alternatives to hard-wired internet connections such as mobile hotspots."

**SD-42 constituent and small business owner Gordon Robinson said,** "I run a management consulting practice from my home office in Callicoon. I am grateful for Senator Metzger's perseverance in getting this broadband bill passed in the Senate, and hope that the study is implemented so that folks like me who are struggling with the limitations on our business can get the service we need to grow. The speed and quality of the internet service I am able to get in Sullivan County is not sufficient for me to conduct business, especially in a post-COVID world where there is increased reliance on working remotely and in a connected way. When I have important meetings I have to drive into New York City to get a dependable connection. This translates to a limit on how much business I can conduct, which hits my bottom line in a very direct way, as do my travel costs and the costs of maintaining two offices."

**AARP New York State Director Beth Finkel said,** "The pandemic has heightened the need for high-speed internet in all of our communities, particularly for older New Yorkers. High-speed internet, also known as broadband, ensures telehealth and on-line grocery shopping so New Yorkers can get the health care and food they need without risk of infection, among many other benefits. It allows New Yorkers now required to work from home to keep their jobs, and it helps us battle potentially deadly social isolation by enabling contact with family members and loved ones virtually. AARP New York applauds Senator Metzger for her legislation to ensure regulators evaluate and report on the need to expand high-speed internet access, and we thank Assemblyman Sean Ryan for helping guide the legislation through the Assembly; we urge Governor Cuomo to sign the bill."

*Jen Metzger represents the 42nd Senate District, which includes all of Sullivan County and parts of Delaware, Orange, and Ulster Counties. Senator Metzger serves as Chair of the Agriculture Committee and sits on the Environmental Conservation, Education, Health, Energy and Telecommunications, Local*

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RELATED LEGISLATION

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**2019-S8805**

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- Introduced
  
- ◦ In Committee Assembly
  - In Committee Senate
  
- ◦ On Floor Calendar Assembly
  - On Floor Calendar Senate
  
- ◦ Passed Assembly
  - Passed Senate
  
- Vetoed By Governor
  
- Signed By Governor
  
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Relates to the public service commission reviewing broadband and fiber optic services within the state

July 17, 2020

Senate Floor Calendar

Sponsored by **Jen Metzger**

Do you support this bill?