

# Governor Parson directs nearly \$50 million in relief funds to aid in broadband expansion and COVID-19 response

July 2, 2020

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. – Today Governor Parson announced nearly \$50 million to support broadband expansion across Missouri, including support directed at telehealth and education. The Governor also signed house bill 1768, which expands the state's existing Missouri Broadband Grant Program until 2027.

Funding for the new programs comes in large part from the Coronavirus Relief Fund and is aimed at improving resiliency and aiding in the COVID-19 response.

"Providing Missourians essential services during this time is one of our top priorities," Governor Mike Parson said. "Ensuring citizens have appropriate access to telehealth and education and that they are able to telework is critical. These are not optional services, and we want to do our best to increase connectivity across the state."

Currently, an estimated 300,000 Missouri households, 195,000 K-12 students, and 54,000 businesses and farms lack access to high speed internet.

The expansion includes several new initiatives.

**Emergency Broadband Investment:** This initiative allocates \$20 million to establish a reimbursement program for broadband providers. It will assist providers with construction costs for new broadband expansion to households with students or vulnerable populations. By November of 2020, this program plans to make more than 10,000 new connections in unserved and underserved areas of the state.

**Telehealth:** \$5.25 million will support connectivity for telehealth services for vulnerable populations. In partnership with Missouri Telehealth Network, located with the University of Missouri – Columbia's School of Medicine, more than 12,500 hotspots will be secured for use by the Federally Qualified Health Centers and the Community Mental Health Centers.

**Libraries:** The Office of the State Librarian within the Secretary of State's office will deploy \$2.5 million to implement and administer a grant program for Missouri's libraries to access resources for hotspots and Wi-Fi enabled devices to support telehealth and students of higher education.

**K-12 Distance Learning:** The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education will allocate \$10 million of the Coronavirus Relief Fund to Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to seek reimbursement for eligible costs to increase student connectivity.

**Higher Education Distance Learning:** The Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development will allocate \$10 million of the Coronavirus Relief Fund to public institutions to upgrade the campus broadband networks, offer students access to Wi-Fi enabled devices or hotspots, and enhance learning management systems.

**Broadband Technical Assistance Request:** The Missouri Association of Councils of Government (MACOG) and DED have partnered together to apply for nearly \$615,000 in grant support from the Economic Development Administration (EDA) to support a pilot project for Broadband Modeling and Engineering Feasibility Plans for up to 24 counties or 8 regional clusters.

## What state leaders are saying about these programs:

"Improving Missouri's digital infrastructure is essential to the resiliency of our economy in this pandemic and beyond," Department of Economic Development Director Rob Dixon said. "By providing these essential resources, we are better able to work toward economic recovery, and help Missourians prosper."

"Our public colleges and universities have been working hard to help all students gain access to remote learning. We are grateful there is funding to address these issues. We know going forward this will continue to be important to reduce barriers for our students as they persevere in their studies," said Zora Mulligan, Commissioner of Higher Education.

"Ensuring Missouri students have equitable access to the tools necessary to advance their learning at anytime and anyplace must remain a priority for our state," Commissioner of Education Margie Vandeven said.

"We are extremely excited about the partnership being forged between Missouri Telehealth Network and the Missouri Department of Economic Development that will allow us to better serve our citizens," said Richard J. Barohn, MD, Executive Vice Chancellor for Health A



How can we help?

“Libraries across Missouri have stepped up to take care of their communities, especially during the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic,” Secretary of State Jay Ashcroft said. “While libraries have expanded the availability of services, they have done so in a new landscape, where more than ever technology is at the forefront.”

“MACOG and Missouri’s Regional Planning Commissions have been working hand in hand with the State for many years on the broadband priority,” said Linda Conner, MACOG President & Executive Director of the Lake of the Ozarks Council of Local Governments. “This technical assistance activity will lead to clear, actionable deployment projects that will address key gaps in the state where now there is little to no access to broadband service.”

For more information about these new initiatives, visit [showmestrong.mo.gov/broadband](https://showmestrong.mo.gov/broadband).



How can we help?