

SUBJECT: Creating the governor's broadband development council

COMMITTEE: State Affairs — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 12 ayes — Phelan, Hernandez, Deshotel, Guerra, Harless, Holland,
Hunter, P. King, Parker, E. Rodriguez, Smithee, Springer

0 nays

1 absent — Raymond

WITNESSES: For — Kenny Scudder, AARP; Laurie Mahaffey, Central Texas Library System; Jennifer Bergland, Texas Computer Education Association; Wendy Woodland, Texas Library Association; Lynden Kamerman, Texas Telephone Association; Richard Lawson, Verizon; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Kara Mayfield, Association of Rural Communities in Texas; Jason Winborn, AT&T; Marisa Finley, Baylor Scott & White Health; Henry Flores, CenturyLink; Dana Chiodo, CompTIA; Priscilla Camacho, Dallas Regional Chamber; Dale Artho, Deaf Smith County Commissioner; Dana Harris, Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce; Bill Lauderback, Lower Colorado River Authority; Andrew Wise, Microsoft; David Edmonson, TechNet; Jeremy Fuchs, Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association; James Hines, Texas Association of Business; Eric Craven, Texas Electric Cooperatives; Patrick Wade, Texas Grain Sorghum Association; Sara Gonzalez, Texas Hospital Association; Dan Finch, Texas Medical Association; Monty Wynn, Texas Municipal League; Ryan Skrobarczyk, Texas Nursery & Landscape Association; Bay Scoggin, TexPIRG; Russell T. Keene, Texas Public Power Association; Deborah Giles, Texas Technology Consortium & Center for Technology; John Hubbard and Ian Randolph, Texas Telephone Association)

Against — None

On — JP Urban, Public Utilities Commission of Texas; Walt Baum, Texas Cable Association; Weldon Gray, Texas Statewide Telephone Cooperative, Inc.

BACKGROUND: Some have raised concerns that a lack of proper broadband connectivity in rural areas of Texas has left many residents at an economic disadvantage.

DIGEST: CSHB 1960 would create the governor's broadband development council. The council would be composed of 17 members representing internet service providers, nonprofit organizations, advocacy groups, counties, municipalities, school districts, institutions of higher education, and the Legislature. Members would be appointed and serve five-year terms. The council would be led by a presiding officer designated by the governor.

The broadband development council would be required to convene at least once every quarter and at the call of the presiding officer. Administrative support would be provided by the Office of the Governor.

The council would be required to:

- research the progress of broadband development in unserved areas;
- identify barriers to residential and commercial broadband development in unserved areas;
- study solutions to overcome identified barriers that would not favor one technology over another; and
- analyze how statewide access to broadband would benefit economic development, educational opportunities, state and local law enforcement, state emergency preparedness, and the delivery of health care services, including telemedicine or telehealth.

The council could research other matters related to broadband if a majority of the council approved. To perform the studies required by the bill, the council could consult with a representative of an institution of higher education who had published scholarly research on broadband.

The council would be required to prepare and deliver an electronic report of its findings to the governor, the lieutenant governor, and each member of the Legislature by November 1 of every year. The first report would be due November 1, 2020.

The chapter authorizing the council would expire September 1, 2029.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2019.