

Governor Announces Expansion of High-Speed Broadband Access in Sussex County

Georgetown, DE – Emphasizing the growing importance of broadband access in today's economy, Governor Markell today detailed progress the state is making to expand high-speed internet access in underserved communities. Markell and Department of Technology and Information (DTI) Secretary Jim Sills joined legislators and other state and local officials at La Red Health Center to celebrate the completion of a fiber line running from Middletown to Georgetown, and to address the next phase of broadband expansion. The Governor announced a new grant to leverage the recently completed fiber line by extending its reach in the Georgetown region in hopes of better reaching facilities like La Red. Information on the grant and the application process is available at: <http://dti.delaware.gov/information/vendors.shtml>.

"I'm proud of the commitment we have made to broadband and of our consistent ranking as one of the best broadband states, but part of the reason we aren't quite at the top of the rankings is we face a challenge that is seen across the nation – improving access in our rural areas," said Markell.

"So we made rural expansion of high-speed broadband a priority in the new Delaware Broadband Fund, and now we will begin to realize the benefits throughout this region, from schools and libraries, to health care facilities and places that provide government services. And the additional benefits will be far-reaching, starting with the jobs created through the construction phase, and continuing with better access for businesses, farms, and homes."

A grant of about \$2 million will be awarded to one or more

private companies that offer the best plans to use the new fiber line to reach underserved Delawareans. They must reach key sites, like those Markell mentioned.

Reaffirming the theme of his State of the State address in January, Markell has emphasized that the ability to access cutting-edge information technology at higher speeds is essential to every industry in the state, and through initiatives like this broadband expansion, the state will fully unleash its economic potential. The Governor noted that online tools and resources exponentially increase the possibilities to advance education, careers, well-being, and public safety, but that also means that there is a clear dividing line between those who have access to high-speed broadband and those who don't. According to the FCC's Eighth Broadband Progress Report, released in August 2012, [of the 19 million Americans who live where fixed broadband is unavailable, 14.5 million live in rural areas.](#)

"The critical fiber line that has just been completed will introduce significantly enhanced broadband access into this area to support not only State and municipal offices, but private industry and non-profits as well," said Secretary Sills, whose Department leads the state's broadband expansion efforts. "Today's announcement focuses on expanding on the project with additional investment in Sussex County to make Delaware the leading state for broadband."

Funding for the grant comes from the Delaware Broadband Fund, established last year by House Bill 96, which was sponsored by Representative Darryl Scott (D-Dover) and Senator Brian Bushweller (D-Dover). The legislation provides that the Fund will support and enhance rural broadband initiatives in underserved areas of the State, as well as broadband access at public schools and public libraries.

"The project announced today is what we had in mind when creating the Delaware Broadband Fund – to see the first

investment being made in healthcare is exciting,” said Rep. Scott, who took part in the event at La Red. “It provides La Red access to electronic medical records and other information and services that can save lives and make the delivery of healthcare more cost effective.”

The expansion of broadband in Sussex County will allow for an increase in access speeds from 1.5 MB to potentially 10GB, with most users expected to opt for between 10MB and 100MB.

“Broadband is an important economic engine for the 21st Century,” said Sen. Bushweller. “With this expansion, we’re delivering on our commitment to improve our quality of life by ensuring more cost-effective health care for our citizens.”

La Red CEO Brian Olson participated in the announcement, highlighting the benefits that the health center has already realized through telemedicine and the opportunities that the improved broadband service would offer for enhancing medical care for underserved populations through remote access to specialists. Attendees, who also included legislators supportive of HB 96, received a tour that focused on the Health Center’s telemedicine capabilities.

“It’s great news for Sussex County. Broadband is one of the engines that drives economic growth and learning, and there are far too many places in Sussex County that don’t have access,” said Sen. Brian Pettyjohn (R-Georgetown), who attended today’s announcement. “As a result, many Sussex County children are currently at a disadvantage because they don’t have the internet access that schools assume all children have these days. It also puts businesses at a huge disadvantage.”

“We have been working to expand broadband access throughout Sussex County for quite some time now in order to improve the overall quality of life in the area, as well as attract new business ventures,” said Rep. Ruth Briggs King (R-Georgetown),

a member of the Sussex Broadband Working Group who also attended today's announcement. "I am excited about this latest initiative, which is one more step in an ongoing process of providing much-needed broadband capabilities in those more remote areas of the county."

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