

INTERIM JOINT COMMITTEE ON TOURISM, SMALL BUSINESS, AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Minutes of the 3rd Meeting of the 2024 Interim

August 29, 2024

Call to Order and Roll Call

The third meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Tourism, Small Business, and Information Technology was held on August 29, 2024, at 1:00 PM in Room 149 of the Capitol Annex. Representative Phillip Pratt, Chair, called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

Present were:

Members: Representatives Phillip Pratt Co-Chair; Kim King Co-Chair; Senators Shelley Funke Frommeyer, Jason Howell, Robby Mills, Brandon J. Storm, Phillip Wheeler, and Mike Wilson; Representatives Chad Aull, Shane Baker, Daniel Fister, Deanna Frazier Gordon, Chris Freeland, Chris Fugate, Richard Heath, Nima Kulkarni, Savannah Maddox, Candy Massaroni, Shawn McPherson, Michael Sarge Pollock, Rachel Roberts, Sarah Stalker, Ashley Tackett Laferty, Nancy Tate, Killian Timoney, Timmy Truett, Bill Wesley, Nick Wilson, and Susan Witten.

Guests: Brian Gupton, CEO, Dataseam; Damian Johnson, Superintendent, Jenkins Independent Schools; Phillip Watts, Superintendent, Breathitt County Schools; Thomas Burns, COO & CIO, Lawrence County Schools; Brody Tincher, student, Jackson County Independent Schools, and Meghan Sandfoss, Executive Director, Office of Broadband Deployment

LRC Staff: Carla Montgomery, Austin Johnson, Matissa Robinson, and Sasche Allen.

Approval of Minutes

A motion to approve the minutes of the July 31, 2024, meeting was made by Representative Fister, seconded by Representative Timoney, and approved by voice vote.

Dataseam: Investments and Partnerships Building the Kentucky Technology Workforce

Dataseam, through collaboration with the private sector, K-12 public schools, postsecondary education partners, and state and federal government, offers advanced computers to school districts across the state. This is designed to improve the Commonwealth's rural technology workforce, create a statewide grid system that

commercializes university research, and recruit students into STEM related fields through scholarships and other opportunities at the University of Louisville and Morehead State University. Since 2003, the organization has provided students with instructional computers and advanced curriculum to assist with state-based cancer research and advancement of cancer drug discoveries. Dataseam currently works with 55 school districts representing 40 percent of K-12 public school students. Brian Gupton, CEO of Dataseam, detailed the organization's registered apprenticeship program for information technology in partnership with the U.S. Department of Labor that extends the opportunity to high school juniors and seniors to obtain industry certifications and practical work experience. Damian Johnson, Superintendent of Jenkins Independent Schools, Phillip Watts, Superintendent of Breathitt County Schools, and Thomas Burns, COO & CIO of Lawrence County Schools, attested to their districts' experiences with Dataseam and the positive impact on their school districts and workforces.

Representative Truett commented on the importance of the programs Dataseam provides and acknowledged advancements in information technology.

Representative Fugate discussed Dataseam's registered apprenticeship program in his district.

Answering questions from Representative Kulkarni, Mr. Gupton discussed the development of curriculum for the registered apprenticeship program that can be broadly applied across various sectors. He said time and funding are aspects considered with the organization's programs.

Representative Baker requested that a participating student testify to their experience with Dataseam. Brody Tincher, a student at Jackson County Independent Schools, spoke about his experience in the program and the positive impact it has had on his life. Mr. Gupton further discussed the application process and curriculum of the registered apprenticeship program.

Representative McPherson made remarks about new programs in Allen County and discussed the need for workforce development and programs such as Dataseam to improve workforce participation.

Representative Frazier Gordon thanked Mr. Gupton for providing committee members with a list of district specific information.

In response to inquiries from Representative Stalker, Mr. Gupton stated Dataseam requires school districts offer at least the federal minimum wage to apprentices. The program is divided into three phases which includes a 50-cent hourly increase with each phase

advancement. Each district has the discretion to offer more than what Dataseam requires. Addressing follow up questions, Mr. Gupton discussed Dataseam's funding mechanisms throughout the years.

Office of Broadband Development Update

Meghan Sandfoss, Executive Director of the Office of Broadband Deployment (OBD), provided an update on the office's broadband deployment fund implementation and progress of the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program. She discussed funds dispersed, progress of implementation, differences between various phases, contracts that have been returned for execution, and progress of pole attachments. Round 1 of funding totaled almost \$90 million of \$203 million total investment touching 36 counties. To date, \$13.7 million has been disbursed. The deadline for the projects is January 2026. American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Capital Projects fund awarded 57 additional projects. Approximately 3/4 of the contracts have been negotiated and ready for execution. The BEAD program's initial proposal was submitted as two volumes in December 2023. Volume one described the challenge process which determined the eligible locations and was approved in March 2024 by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA). The challenge program started on May 6, 2024. They received over 400,000 challenges. Volume two described the subgrantee selection process and was approved in June 2024. On August 14, 2024, OBD started receiving prequalification information from prospective subgrantees. Application will be through an online portal. Final approval from NTIA is required before they can open up BEAD application process and release funds to recipients. The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) will announce Connect and ReConnect awards for broadband. Those USDA projects will be removed from BEAD Program eligibility.

Representative Tackett Laferty requested further information on the broadband development funds available to the counties to be provided to the committee.

Senator Robby Mills requested further information about broadband availability to counties to be provided to the committee.

Answering a question from Senator Howell, Ms. Sandfoss said the technology that high-speed internet is delivered through is a key factor in service speeds. Fiber is the most reliable.

In response to Chairman Pratt, Ms. Sandfoss stated she could not comment on specific details regarding pole attachments. She said pole attachments are a national problem. She confirmed that the Office of Broadband Deployment has not received the BEAD Program funding that is expected to be \$1.1 billion, but those funds will be available once the subgrantee selection process is complete.

Adjournment

There being no further business before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 2:04 p.m.