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Expanding Broadband Internet Accessibility in Rural Alabama

HB400

BACKGROUND

Expanding broadband internet access across rural and other under-served areas of Alabama is critical to the state's economic vitality and future growth.

Providing more broadband access across the state will:

- Enable more and better economic development opportunities for rural Alabamians, including job creation
- Offer better educational opportunities for our students
- Enhance residents' quality of life by increasing access to high-tech health care solutions
- Support advancements in agricultural technology
- Support small business growth

BILL SUMMARY

HB 400 facilitates the deployment of broadband access throughout the state by granting to electric providers the ability to use existing electric easements for broadband purposes. They may also work with affiliates or third parties under contract to help provide broadband.

The bill confirms that electric providers can install, operate, and maintain broadband systems using their easements. This will encourage electric providers to invest in broadband deployment and will accelerate the cost-effective expansion of broadband access in rural Alabama, in many cases using existing infrastructure.

The bill establishes a process for resolving any disagreements about the breadth of an easement and provides remedies for land owners. In the likely rare circumstances where needed, it will allow for the condemnation of an easement for broadband purposes, as some other broadband providers already have.

An electric provider's requirement to maintain the easement and other obligations under the easement (like notice) are not affected by this bill. The bill also includes notice provisions if new broadband equipment is installed in the future.

An electric provider cannot require a customer to purchase broadband service as a condition of receiving electric service.