



OREGON'S SENATOR JEFF MERKLEY

Coronavirus Resources: Broadband

Sen. Merkley, using his leadership position on the Senate Appropriations Committee, fought hard to make sure the \$2.2 trillion coronavirus relief funding stabilizes families, workers, small businesses, housing, education, agriculture, and health care. As these resources are distributed, Sen. Merkley's office will keep Oregonians up to date on what in the bill helps individuals and communities, and how to access the resources. He will continue to fight to make sure much-needed aid gets to the people who need it most.

Coronavirus relief to help connect rural communities:

As Oregonians and Americans stay at home to help prevent the spread of the coronavirus, high-quality internet access for school, work, and more will be critically important. The coronavirus relief bill provides support for expanded and improved broadband internet access with the following programs:

ReConnect Program: Senator Merkley's Agriculture and Rural Development Subcommittee included in its portion of the economic rescue bill an additional \$100 million for the ReConnect Program to help ensure rural Americans and tribal communities have access to broadband.

- This program is already in existence, and requires an application to USDA for grants, loans, or a 50/50 grant-loan hybrid.
- Eligible entities include non-profits, for-profit corporations, limited liability companies, cooperative organizations, states and localities, U.S. territories, and tribal communities.
- Eligibility is also based on access to sufficient broadband in a geographic area, and USDA will not fund more than one project in a given geographic area. At least 90% of the households to be served by a project receiving a loan or grant under the pilot program must be in a rural area without sufficient access to fixed broadband at a minimum speed of 10 Mbps/1 Mbps. Wireless and satellite is not eligible.
- The deadline for the current round of ReConnect Pilot Program applications has been extended to April 15, 2020. For more information on applying for ReConnect, please visit <https://www.usda.gov/reconnect>.

Education and Distance Learning: The stimulus package provides additional funding through an Education Stabilization Fund, which may be used by school districts to purchase broadband connectivity. These funds will be allocated on the same basis as the Title I-A formula under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

- The bill also provides \$25 million to support the Distance Learning and Telemedicine (DLT) Program to improve services in rural areas of America.
- Funding goes toward initial capital assets for equipment (e.g., video conferencing equipment, computers) that operate via telecommunications to rural end-users of telemedicine and distance learning. Broadband facilities (if owned by the applicant) are also eligible.
- Federally recognized tribes are eligible to apply for DLT grants. Approved purposes can be found [here](#).

Supporting Veterans: The CARES Act includes \$3.1 billion for the Office of Veterans Affairs to expand telehealth programs, including telehealth visits, tele-ICUs and teleradiology capabilities, and other services that allow veterans to receive care from home.

- The bill also allows for the VA to enter into agreements with telecommunications companies to provide broadband for veterans in support of providing telehealth and telemental health care. I
- Veterans seeking broadband support can call local VA facilities or send secure messages to their providers on My HealtheVet to ask about this option.

Additional Coronavirus relief to help boost broadband.

Please continue to check back for additional information on accessing these resources:

- \$200 million for the FCC Connected Care Pilot Program. This program will support efforts of health care providers to address COVID-19 by using telehealth to connect with patients.
- \$185 million to support rural critical access for hospitals, rural tribal health and telehealth programs.
- \$1.032 billion in critically needed resources to support the tribal health system during the pandemic, including new investments for telehealth services, electronic health records improvement, and expanded disease surveillance by tribal epidemiology centers.

For updates: Visit merkleysenate.gov/coronavirus for updates on these and other resources as the relief bills are implemented.