**State Capitol Week in Review**

October 17, 2025

LITTLE ROCK –The Arkansas Broadband Office known as ARConnect has been working on major broadband expansion and upgrades for Arkansas.  The Federal Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program approved a new $1 billion initiative in funding to overhaul the Arkansas broadband expansion plan.  Currently, the state is in the final stages of its proposal and just completed the public comment period in August.

In 2024, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) approved Arkansas’ initial proposal.  However, new federal rules implemented in 2025 caused the program to revise its original plans and a new application process for internet service providers (ISP) was established.  Pending authorization from the Arkansas General Assembly and NTIA, construction is now expected to begin in 2026.

According to the draft Final Proposal, the BEAD program received 730 applications from 33 ISPs.  Provisional awards were given to 23 ISPs at a cost of $308.3 million, which ARConnect reports was $275 million less than previous estimates.  These providers are responsible for introducing affordable, reliable high-speed internet to 79,240 homes and businesses in areas with minimal or no broadband service.  The intent is to deliver broadband in underserved areas and to stimulate what the plan calls “home-grown economic development”.

The overall goal is to connect all households and businesses that lack internet access. The technology plan aims for 76% fiber, 16% satellite, 7% fixed wireless, and 1% hybrid technologies.  The average grant per location is projected to be approximately $3,891, also one of the lowest in the country.

The state previously launched a challenge process for the public to report inaccuracies in its broadband coverage map to make sure all underserved areas are located and represented by broadband. The first national broadband map was created by NTIA in 2011 and is being continually updated by each state. These maps now serve as vital tools for consumers, businesses and policy makers to find out who is offering broadband, what types of broadband they are offering and where it is being provided.

ARConnect also launched a new Internet affordability dashboard to simplify comparing low-cost internet plans.  Affordability is one of their main goals in providing internet access to the state.  This user-friendly dashboard provides information in one accessible place, county by county, for residents to identify plans in their area and compare offerings.  You can find the Affordability Dashboard online at: <https://broadband.arkansas.gov/affordability/>.

The Arkansas Fiber Academy, an accelerated training program for jobs in broadband and telecommunications, also announced their newest offering for the Fiber Network Engineer Program.  Developed in partnership with industry leaders to meet the growing demand for skilled professionals in fiber-to-the-home (FTTH) technology.  The intensive 15-week training program will be offered at no cost to eligible participants through a grant from the Arkansas Office of Skills Development.  Additional broadband career training programs are available.  For information on these programs check out the website at: <https://www.arkansascc.org/arkansasfiberacademy>.