More than 180,000 North Carolina households are getting critical assistance affording high-speed internet service thanks to a federal relief program that helps families in need pay internet bills and fully participate in the digital economy.

With 182,473 households enrolled in the Federal Communications Commission’s Emergency Broadband Benefit Program (EBBP), North Carolina’s level of enrollment ranks sixth among the 50 states. In April, Governor Roy Cooper sent letters to the state’s internet service providers (ISPs) asking them to participate in this effort to get more North Carolinian’s connected to high-speed internet. A number of ISPs responded to the Governor’s call to participate and enroll their customers in this program.

"Affordability is essential to access the internet and digital equity," Governor Cooper said. "This subscription support empowers North Carolina families to access the online educational, business and healthcare resources they need to compete in today's digital society."

The EBBP, which opened May 12, discounts an eligible household's monthly internet bill by as much as $50 per month. The discount increases to $75 per month for those living on tribal lands. Eligible households can also get a one-time discount of $100 toward the purchase of a laptop, tablet or desktop computer through participating providers.

"The pandemic highlighted digital inequities and the struggle of many families to afford quality internet," Jim Weaver, North Carolina Department of Information Technology (NCDIT) secretary and state chief information officer, said. “We encourage all eligible North Carolina families to sign up for this benefit."

Households with an income at or less than 135 percent of federal poverty guidelines are eligible for the EBBP. A household also qualifies if at least one member participates in a federal benefits program such as Medicaid, SNAP or Lifeline, receives benefits under the free and reduced-price school lunch program, lost a job or a significant amount of income in the past year, received a Federal Pell Grant or is part of an internet service provider’s low-income or COVID-19 program.

The program is slated to continue until the $3.2 billion appropriated by the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 runs out or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services declares the pandemic is over, whichever happens first.

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