NCSL CONTACTS:
Abbie Gruwell, Senior Committee Director, abbie.gruwell@ncsl.org

Issue Description
States recognize more than ever the need to close the digital divide and provide reliable, affordable connectivity to all constituents. Especially as reliance on remote work, learning, and healthcare has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is essential to the success of our economy and schools that rural and urban communities have access to the internet. NCSL closely tracks broadband legislation in the states, and in 2020, 33 states enacted legislation or adopted resolutions in areas such as educational institutions, “dig once” programs, broadband funding, governance authorities and commissions, municipal-run broadband networks, rural and underserved communities, smart communities, and taxes. All 50 states have created state broadband task forces, authorities, or commissions to coordinate broadband expansion. Some states have created programs to identify underserved and unserved areas through online public mapping websites, while others have established task forces to provide input on the development of a statewide broadband framework and promote public-private sector participation. As more states develop Statewide Broadband Strategies, Congress and the Federal Communications Commission have an opportunity to identify gaps in access and provide states with the tools they need to serve their unique constituencies.

2020 Broadband Rural and Underserved Legislation
NCSL Position

NCSL supports the expansion of innovative technologies and competitive access to high-speed internet. NCSL’s policies on telecommunications demonstrate our commitment to working collaboratively with the federal government to ensure everyone has access, no matter where they live or economic status. States are dedicated to finding new ways to close the digital divide as parents and workers face unprecedented connectivity challenges, and those efforts require regulatory flexibility and consistent funding for state broadband programs. NCSL also recognizes that broadband access is critical to empowering minority and minority women entrepreneurs to develop, grow and improve productivity of their businesses as well as strengthening our nation’s competitiveness worldwide. NCSL urges Congress to work with states in developing an integrated broadband strategy to ensure universal deployment, including mapping and deployment models.

Our policy also supports a periodic examination of current and future radio frequency spectrum needs and uses and supports management reforms to improve the current allocation and assignment process. NCSL encourages consultation with states when considering changes to spectrum allocation and recommends delaying proposals that would reallocate spectrum currently reserved for state, local, public utility, and state transportation and safety purposes without examining the impact on state users.