

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 17, 2020

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MEDIA ADVISORY

Battling Connectivity Issues? Help is Available at the Vermont Department of Public Service

Montpelier, VT - Vermonters are staying home and staying safe during the COVID-19 emergency, but for many that has meant getting by with no access to the internet at home. The difficulty has been particularly challenging for students who are adapting to remote learning, individuals in need of telehealth care, and workers who could earn an income if they could work from home. “If this is your situation, we need to hear from you,” said June Tierney, the Commissioner of the Department of Public Service. “The COVID-19 emergency has starkly exposed how dependent we are on frequent and reliable internet access to meet everyday needs,” Tierney said. “Before COVID-19, folks could count on regular access to the internet from many different places such as their workplace or libraries,” she continued, “but now that we have to stay home to slow the spread of the COVID-19 virus, the reality is most of us need internet access at home, whether to school kids, to get medical care, to telecommute to keep a job, or to take a new job that you can do from home.” Tierney sees the COVID-19 emergency very much like a “natural storm disaster that rips away bridges and roads. The internet is the highway to essential everyday services. Even if it is only temporary, we need to find ways now to get the internet to people where they live.”

To help reconnect Vermonters at home with no internet to the means to meet many everyday essentials, Commissioner Tierney issued a “[call to action](#)” on April 10th to Vermont’s utilities and internet service providers, asking that they look for ways to team up and provide home connectivity solutions for Vermonters who have none:

https://publicservice.vermont.gov/sites/dps/files/documents/RE_%20COVID-19%20Emergency_%20%20PSD%20Call%20To%20Action_0.pdf.

The Department is also tackling the companion challenge of identifying Vermonters who need help now with connectivity, which is why the Department is asking you to contact its Consumer Affairs and Public Information Division (CAPI) for assistance with your specific situation. CAPI will need you to explain a little bit about who you are and why you cannot get connected to the internet. For instance, does your household need broadband access for remote learning or telehealth services? Is your home located without access to cable or fiber service? Or no wireless cell signal that could be used to extend broadband to your home? The Department will use any information that you can provide to reach out to carriers and Vermont’s other utilities to see if there is anything that can be done to help you. CAPI can be reached by either **calling** 800-622-4496 (leave a message with your phone number and staff will return your call promptly), **emailing** psd.consumer@vermont.gov or by **filling out** the [online complaint form](https://capi.epsd.vermont.gov/?q=node/51) (<https://capi.epsd.vermont.gov/?q=node/51>). The Department will also be releasing a survey available on its [home page](https://publicservice.vermont.gov/) (<https://publicservice.vermont.gov/>) for Vermonters to fill out about their internet needs.

Several internet service providers, cable companies and mobile wireless companies have already stepped up to help Vermont through COVID-19. “If you are at home and you need help with

affording your internet access during this emergency, I encourage you to explore these connectivity options,” Tierney said. You can get detailed information about available options by either calling CAPI or going on the Department’s website, including links to most Vermont service providers who are offering help during the COVID-19 emergency as well as information about free Wi-Fi hotspots that can be accessed from a car so you can practice good social distancing.

Here are just a few of new, temporary connectivity options that are available to help Vermonters through the COVID-19 emergency:

- VTel is providing increased network speeds and capacity to Vermont high schools and hospitals. *As reported by Vermont Business Magazine (March 31, 2020)* [Vermont Telephone Company \(VTel\)](#) worked with [Ericsson](#), to provide free internet access and Chromebooks to Rutland City public schools students affected by school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Burlington Telecom worked with the Burlington School District to provide free 25 Mbps symmetrical Internet access, a Wi-Fi device and installation to any family with a serviceable address (normal installation) and with school-aged children who do not have home internet to promote and support remote learning.
- Charter offers free Spectrum broadband and Wi-Fi access for 60 days to households with K-12 and/or college students who do not already have a Spectrum broadband subscription and at any service level up to 100 Mbps and has waived installation fees for new student households.
- Comcast provides its Internet Essentials Free to new, eligible customers for 60 days providing 25/3 Mbps Broadband service. Xfinity also [offers](#) eligible university students who live in Comcast’s service areas and need internet service, a Visa prepaid card worth about two months of internet service with no upfront fees or installation costs.
- [QLink](#) provides free cell phone service for income-eligible Vermonters. You can apply online with QLink, bring your own phone and get free 8GB of data and unlimited talk and text during the company’s COVID-19 response period.

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