AN ACT TO CREATE THE HELPING MISSISSIPPIANS AFFORD BROADBAND ACT; TO DEFINE TERMS AS USED IN THE ACT; TO REQUIRE THE DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SERVICES, IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE WIRELESS COMMUNICATION COMMISSION, TO CREATE A PROGRAM FOR THE PURPOSE OF PROVIDING FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO ELIGIBLE HOUSEHOLDS TO PURCHASE BROADBAND SERVICES; TO PROVIDE SUBSIDIES TO PROVIDERS IN ORDER TO REDUCE BROADBAND COSTS TO HOUSEHOLDS; TO PROVIDE THAT FUNDING FOR SUBSIDY COSTS SHALL COME FROM FUNDS AVAILABLE PURSUANT TO THE AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI:

SECTION 1. This act may be cited as the "Helping Mississippians Afford Broadband Act."

SECTION 2. As used in this section, the following words shall have the meanings ascribed herein unless the context clearly requires otherwise:

(a) "Commission" means Wireless Communication Commission.

(b) "Department" means Department of Information Technology Services.

(c) "Provider" means a broadband internet service provider, including any telecommunications company, cable
television company, or wireless network provider that provides broadband internet service.

(d) "Eligible Households" are defined as those households that have already been approved to receive the federal Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) or the federal Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) benefit.

SECTION 3. (1) The department in conjunction with the commission shall create a program for the purpose of providing financial assistance to eligible households to purchase broadband services. An amount not to exceed Fifteen Dollars ($15.00) per month per household shall be paid directly to providers to reduce households broadband costs. Either a provider or a household may apply for the benefit.

(2) It is the intent of the Legislature to appropriate, so much as necessary, funds from the State Treasury that may be payable from federal funds available for such purpose, to the department for this purpose.

(3) The State Treasury shall have the authority to distribute funds to the department to effectuate the purpose of this act. The department shall allocate funds appropriated under this act for subsidies. The department is granted the powers and authorities necessary to implement this act. The funds authorized in this section shall be payable by the department.

(4) Funding for subsidy costs shall come from funds available pursuant to the American Rescue Plan Act, as determined
by the State Treasury. The State Treasury shall have the
authority to transfer funds to efficiently and effectively
accomplish the mission of the act.

(5) The money appropriated by this act shall be paid out of
any money in the State Treasury to the credit of the proper fund
or funds as set forth in this act, upon warrants issued by the
State Fiscal Officer, and the State Fiscal Officer shall issue the
warrants upon requisitions signed by the proper person, officer or
officers in the manner provided by law.

(6) The Department in conjunction with the commission shall
appoint an ombudsman to monitor this subsidy. The ombudsman will
advocate for those eligible to receive the subsidy and will work
to ensure this subsidy reaches the underserved communities that
need it most.

SECTION 4. This act shall take effect and be in force from
and after February 1, 2022.