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### **Tenn. behind in broadband usage per household, Task Force says**

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The Tennessee Broadband Task Force has spent much of the past six months studying the availability of high-speed internet, or broadband, to Tennesseans.

The task force recently released a report which determined that Tennessee ranks 37th in the United States for broadband usage.

"This world is becoming divided into the wired and the fired - those with broadband lines and those in unemployment lines," said the task force co-chair, Sen. Roy Herron of Dresden.

Only one in four Tennessee households subscribe to broadband services, the report stated. In Tennessee, broadband service is usually provided by local phone companies, such as Bell South, or cable television providers. The task force recommends increasing the number of broadband providers to drive competition.

"The current level of broadband adoption in Tennessee is unacceptable," said Pat Miller, director of the Tennessee Regulatory Authority and task force member.

According to the report, teaching Tennesseans about the benefits of broadband is just as important as increases its availability.

The report stated that "Tennesseans need to be educated about the benefits of broadband technology ... Tennessee needs to make a purposeful effort to serve rural areas with broadband service. Until that occurs, Tennessee will lose ground - and jobs and educational opportunities-to states willing to make that commitment."

The Task Force called for a public-private partnership to develop a statewide plan to promote broadband availability and usage, similar to the ConnectKentucky program, which reportedly raised broadband usage from 60 percent of that state's households to 90 percent by the end of 2006.

The ConnectKentucky program operated, according to the task force report, by gathering data of broadband availability by cooperating with providers of the service to determine where broadband was available in the state. After this data was collected,

ConnectKentucky could identify areas that were not served and educate these communities about broadband value, therefore raising demand and making the areas more attractive to broadband service providers.

"Every Tennessee home and business should have access to broadband service," said Rep. Mark Maddox, Dresden, who co-chaired the task force with Herron.

The task force's report included the following recommendations for improving Tennessee's standing in broadband availability and usage:

- Establish a program that promotes access to broadband service in every home and business.
- Identify and coordinate state efforts toward expanding broadband deployment and usage.
- Establish a public-private partnership similar to ConnectKentucky.
- Expand policies to promote competition.

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