*Welcome to LLA Reports, a podcast produced by the Louisiana Legislative Auditor’s office. This podcast is intended to be an oral representation of the written report it highlights and is primarily for the use of the Louisiana Legislature.*

This is Krista Baker-Hernandez. I’m a manager for LLA’s Performance Audit Services. This episode of LLA Reports focuses on our new report titled “Broadband Expansion in Louisiana.”

This report provides information on three federally-funded broadband expansion programs in Louisiana – the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) program – or RDOF; the American Rescue Plan Act Capital Projects Fund program – or ARPA-CPF; and the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Program – or BEAD.

The purpose of this report was to provide information on the broadband expansion programs, evaluate the Louisiana Public Service Commission’s – or LPSC’s – role in designating and re-certifying telecommunication providers that receive RDOF funds, provide information on ConnectLA’s coordination of the expansion and accessibility of broadband services, and identify challenges and opportunities related to broadband expansion.

We found that it is unclear whether all RDOF providers will meet the service milestones set by the Federal Communications Commission – or FCC. The FCC requires RDOF providers to provide broadband service to 40 percent of their awarded locations by the end of the third calendar year.

However, as of December 2023, three of the 12 providers in Louisiana were still in planning stages, and approximately 14,500 of the more than 146,000 RDOF-funded locations had broadband access.

In addition, as of March 2024, the majority of the Granting Unserved Municipalities Broadband Opportunities – or GUMBO – 1.0 projects were in the planning and execution stages. According to ConnectLA – which is the state Office of Broadband Development and Connectivity – 12,245 of the more than 66,000 obligated GUMBO 1.0 locations had been served as of March 2024.

We also found that LPSC could improve its oversight of RDOF providers by ensuring they comply with the commission’s orders and by reviewing all project information before annually certifying providers.

We found as well that ConnectLA’s duties include monitoring the 74 GUMBO 1.0 projects, planning and coordinating the BEAD GUMBO 2.0 program, and developing and implementing the state’s digital equity plan.

However, ConnectLA’s staffing is lower than what is recommended by the federal government, and the office is set to close before the GUMBO 2.0 projects are complete.

Additionally, we found that ConnectLA’s map challenge process ended in January 2024, and the results are awaiting approval from the National Telecommunications and Information Administration.

Since ConnectLA has already determined the locations eligible for GUMBO 2.0 funding, any defaults by Louisiana RDOF providers could result in broadband access gaps in rural areas of the state.

We found, too, that ConnectLA has primarily addressed ways to reduce state-level barriers to broadband expansion; however, many of the delays in the development of broadband infrastructure exist at the local level.

As a result of our report, we developed three recommendations.

We recommended thatLPSC ensure RDOF providers submit all periodic project status updates to the commission, as required.

In addition, we recommended thatLPSC rigorously examine all project status information submitted by RDOF providers to the Universal Service Administrative Company and the LPSC before annually certifying them.

We also recommended thatLPSC ensure providers comply with the commission’s orders and send sample advertisements for their broadband and voice services for review once these services are available to consumers.

As part of its response, which is included in the report as Appendix A, LPSC agreed with two of the recommendations and disagreed with one of the recommendations.

*We hope you found this podcast informative, and that you’ll follow future episodes of LLA Reports.*

*This podcast was created as part of the audit report just discussed and is intended primarily for the use of the Louisiana Legislature. Both the full report and the podcast can be found on the LLA’s website at* [*www.lla.la.gov*](http://www.lla.la.gov)*.*

*Thank you for listening.*