Vinehout, Vruwink Introduce "Moving Broadband Forward" Bills

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Package of four bills provide $100 million a year in grants for broadband expansion for the next two years.

MADISON – State Sen. **Kathleen Vinehout** (D-Alma) and State Rep. **Don Vruwink** (D-Milton) introduced their "Moving Broadband Forward" bills on Wednesday.

The package of four bills provide $100 million a year in grants for broadband expansion for the next two years. The legislation also removes costly and time-consuming roadblocks when municipalities want to start their own broadband utilities.

Under the bill, municipalities and the state Department of Transportation would be allowed to install empty conduit lines for future fiber optics as part of road and sidewalk projects. This eliminates the need to dig trenches a second time. The "dig-once" policy could save up to ninety percent of the cost of installing future fiber optics.

Also, the bills require that for a service to be called or advertised as "Broadband" it must

consistently allow users to download at 25 Mbps (megabytes per second) and upload at 3 Mbps.

"Wisconsin has not been serious about expanding broadband," Vinehout said. "The Governor returned $23 million in federal stimulus broadband money in 2011. Since 2014, Wisconsin has approved only $3.9 million in broadband expansion grants. Minnesota spent $85 million during that same time."

The Federal Communications Commission recently reported that thirteen percent of Wisconsinites lack access to at least one broadband service provider. In 2016, according to the tech firm Speedtest, Wisconsin ranked 49th in average internet speed.

"Wisconsin is lagging the nation badly in broadband service, especially compared to Minnesota. We have a lot of catching up to do," Senator Vinehout said. "We won't be able to Move Broadband Forward without a significant investment and a commitment to fixing the problems with current law."