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### Van Buren District Library’s Hotspot Program Transforms Digital Access for Rural Michigan Communities

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DECATUR, MI — The Van Buren District Library (VBDL) is closing the digital divide in southwest Michigan through its popular Mobile Internet Hotspot lending program in partnership with Mobile Beacon, a non-profit provider of cellular broadband Internet services.

Since launching in early 2022, the program has empowered library patrons across Van Buren County to access high-speed internet from home, school, or on the go, no matter where they live. In a rural region where broadband access is often unreliable or unavailable, this service has become a lifeline for many.

“Many of our residents are low-income and lack affordable broadband at home.” Daywi Cook, the Covert Township Supervisor comments, “The library's innovative mobile hotspot lending program -– one of the largest and most impactful in the nation — has been transformative.”

In just the first half of 2025, VBDL’s 420 hotspot devices provided patrons with over 312,000 gigabytes (GB) of data, which is 45 times the national average and nearly 100 times the median usage within Mobile Beacon’s network. This data is crucial for supporting remote learning, job hunting, telehealth, and everyday online needs. During the summer months alone (May through July), community members used more than 149,000 GB of data, a powerful indicator of how vital the program has become.

Mobile Beacon, headquartered in Johnston, Rhode Island provides affordable, reliable, high-speed internet access to schools, libraries, nonprofits, and healthcare organizations, enabling them to expand digital access and inclusion, and fostering stronger, more connected communities. The mission of Mobile Beacon is to power education through broadband.

“Van Buren District Library is the clear leader among our partners.” Mobile Beacon Director of Programs, Joe Gleason, notes. “Their program demonstrates what is possible when a library invests deeply in digital inclusion and puts equitable access at the center of its mission.”

Van Buren District Library’s Executive Director, Dan Hutchins, elaborated “when we started this program back in 2022, we were simply trying to serve the community. It never entered my mind that it was even possible a rural library system such as ours could exceed the data distribution of Mobile Beacon’s large, urban library clients; I’m astonished.”

Each hotspot device averages 109 GB per month, far surpassing national usage trends. The popularity and reach of the program earned VBDL recognition as Mobile Beacon’s top-performing library partner of 2025, outpacing more than 1,800 other libraries in the country that offer similar services.

“I am currently a single dad that relies on the internet for just about everything. We use it to watch movies, play games, work on homework, watch YouTube, videos and help with looking for work. Without this service, we would not be able to afford this basic necessity.” - David S., a VBDL patron.

The Van Buren District Library is headquartered in Decatur and serves Van Buren County, southwest MI from its seven locations in Bangor, Bloomingdale, Covert, Decatur, Gobles, Lawrence, and Mattawan.