

October 6, 2020

Governor Gavin Newsom
1303 10th Street, Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814



Dear Governor Newsom,

Next Century Cities is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit working with local leaders across the country to bring high-speed connectivity within reach for every community. Local governments throughout the state of California, including our 32 member municipalities, understand the far-reaching impact that broadband has on their local economies and are searching for ways to connect their residents with high-quality, affordable broadband. With support from the state, California municipalities can expand their efforts to support residents who are still desperately in need of connectivity solutions.

In the same way that California has been home to technology and innovation, it is also home to a stark digital divide. Among the most disconnected California residents are people of color, people with low-incomes, and people living in rural areas who disproportionately lack broadband access because it is either unavailable or unaffordable. The level of access to broadband in these households and others can drastically change socioeconomic outcomes and overall well-being.

As school, work, healthcare, and government services continue to transition exclusively online due to COVID-19, disparities in broadband access and adoption have become more obvious and unforgiving. Through the measures proposed in SB1130, California can improve broadband connectivity across the state, ensuring that all Californians can connect with educators, employers, and healthcare providers during this challenging time.

According to Zach Friend, Second District Supervisor, Santa Cruz County, "Never before has the digital divide become more acute than during the COVID-19 pandemic. In our community, students are struggling to have reliable connectivity for distance education, seniors without high-speed Internet have been unable to use tele-health, and those with furloughed work or lost jobs are disproportionately unable to apply for benefits or other opportunities due to lack of broadband access. We can greatly increase equity through an elimination of this divide."

Third District Supervisor in Santa Cruz County, Ryan Coonerty, shared similar sentiments. He explained, "We recently experienced the largest natural disaster in our county's history. Access to the internet in our rural and urban areas makes the difference between whether people got evacuation orders and are able to



access critical information about recovery and rebuilding their lives. It's time that broadband be treated like the public utility that it is."

State-level broadband funding programs are a proven way to expand broadband access and adoption rates. Research shows that the availability of state-level funding increases broadband availability by 1-2 percentage points. That small metric equates to several hundred thousand more Californians having access to broadband, an essential tool for full participation in society during and after the pandemic. In particular, CASF-funded municipal bonds are an innovative and ongoing way California can invest in local broadband expansion efforts.

Using your authority as Governor to open a special session to reconsider SB1130, the California legislature will have an opportunity to discuss how local governments across the state are working to meet their communities' broadband needs. Ultimately, increasing connectivity options will help to ensure that California residents have the requisite connectivity to remain safe and fully recover from the pandemic.

Sincerely,

Next Century Cities

cc:

The Honorable Toni Atkins

The Honorable Shannon Grove

The Honorable Anthony Rendon

The Honorable Marie Waldron

