



June 7, 2021

President pro Tem Toni Atkins
California State Senate
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

Speaker Anthony Rendon
California State Assembly
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

Senator Nancy Skinner, Chair
Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

Assemblymember Phil Ting, Chair
Assembly Budget Committee
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

Honorable Members of the California Legislature,

The undersigned community foundations would like to express strong support for Governor Newsom's historic investment of \$7 billion to expand universal broadband access and affordability for high need communities, and support for moving this entire investment forward without delay.

We want to thank you for your leadership in ensuring that the state's responses and investments in these unprecedented times have focused on equity and inclusion. Without your commitment to racial equity, the communities that suffered the most severe impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and were often left out by federal CARES Act dollars, would have been further left behind.

Recovering from the pandemic and building a stronger, more just, and more equitable California will require further investments in bold, innovative, and transformative change. Digital equity - ensuring universal access to fast, affordable, reliable broadband - will be critical to any inclusive recovery.

The Governor's proposal and investment is a strong and visionary step forward, and we believe it should be enacted immediately, as proposed.

More than 15 million Californians live in a broadband monopoly in addition to the 2.3 million who have no access to broadband at the speeds required to fully participate in modern society, from education to economic development to accessing government services. These monopolies have led to digital redlining, where the fastest, most reliable, and most affordable broadband infrastructure investments have been limited to wealthy communities, while the rest are stuck with older, slower, less reliable, and more expensive service or without any service at all.

The long-term, systemic solution to equitable access, service, and affordability is a statewide open access middle mile network as the Governor has proposed — public infrastructure for the public good — and the time to begin building it is now.

We are concerned that delayed and staggered funding will mean millions of Californians living in unserved and underserved communities will continue to fall behind as they face down the disparate impacts of digital exclusion. These are the same communities that have disproportionately borne the brunt of pandemic impacts and further delaying their access to fast, reliable, and affordable broadband will result in further denying them opportunity for a resilient recovery.

Like you, for more than a year we have responded to help mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 in highly impacted communities, from Oakland and San Jose to Southeast Los Angeles. Through grantmaking and public-private partnerships we contributed to efforts that provided economic and rent relief, COVID 19 testing and vaccine equity, and supported distance learning in disconnected communities.

From that vantage point, the inequitable impacts of the digital divide have been glaring—with tens of thousands of Californians facing tremendous barriers to distance learning, left out of the promise of telehealth and unable to schedule access vaccine appointments, locked out of access to government services, and unable to be counted in the Census because of poor connectivity and access to devices.

Just as glaring has been the limited ability of local jurisdictions to quickly expand access or ensure affordability or the necessary speeds and reliability. The governor's proposal would allow localities to immediately begin to solve those shortcomings.

Publicly owned open access middle mile infrastructure is useful mile-by-mile, making a difference as soon as building begins. Slow action, extending the investment across multiple years, or delaying implementation by even a few months would come at a tremendous cost, perpetuating the inequities for years or even a generation to come.

The Governor's plan puts the dollars to work immediately, leverages federal funding that may become unavailable in the case of delay, and deploys solutions to address many facets of the digital divide in parallel, further accelerating the impact of the investment.

We urge your support and immediate adoption of these critical investments in digital equity and our communities' future.



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