

**From:** Christina DiCaro  
**To:** [CA Broadband Council](#)  
**Subject:** CA Library Assoc Comments on the Draft Action Plan - Broadband for All  
**Date:** Thursday, November 19, 2020 3:28:54 PM  
**Attachments:** CLA Broadband letter -signed 2020-11-19.pdf

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Dear Chair Tong and Members of the California Broadband Council,  
Please find attached a copy of the official comment letter from the California Library Association,  
relative to the November 18<sup>th</sup> "Broadband For All Action Plan" draft.

Please do not hesitate to let me know if you have questions or would desire more information  
before your December meetings.

Thank you,  
Christina DiCaro

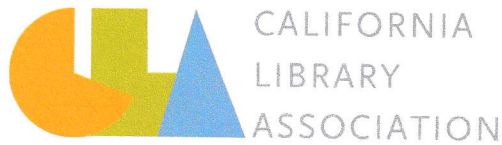
**Christina DiCaro**

**KP PUBLIC AFFAIRS**

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November 19, 2020

Director Amy Tong, Chair  
California Broadband Council  
1325 J Street, Suite 1600  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: Comments from the California Library Association on the “California Broadband for All Action Plan – Preliminary Draft (11/18/20)”**

Dear Chair Tong,

On behalf of the California Library Association (CLA), the statewide association representing city, county, and special district libraries, I would like to thank you and your fellow California Broadband Council members for your thoughtful draft Action Plan released on November 18, 2020. As you consider revisions to the “Broadband for All” plan, CLA would respectfully request that language is added to the Action Plan that would expressly dedicate funding to the State Library and public libraries for the purpose of providing funds for digital device loaning and digital literacy instruction at public libraries, as well as connecting more libraries to CENIC. Libraries are instrumental in achieving the Council’s digital equity goals.

Governor Newsom is to be applauded for issuing his Executive Order N-73-20 on August 14, 2020, which seeks to bridge the digital divide. CLA fully concurs with the Governor’s statement in the Order: *“Whereas, the COVID-19 pandemic has amplified the extent to which broadband is essential for public safety, public health, and economic resilience.”* Public libraries have always been trusted community resource sites and are seeing tremendous pressure on their limited resources during the pandemic, as patrons use the Wi-Fi in library parking lots to research jobless benefits, health concerns, or even perform school work. Cars and socially distanced families on foot wrap around our library buildings, in long lines so that children can receive a school meal, courtesy of our “Lunch in the Library” programs, and then pick up a Chromebook or loaner “hotspot” that the library has issued at no cost.

Tech lending has become a key library service over the last year. For example, Solano County Library has provided 150 hotspots to their community. Since August, the hotspots have been checked out more than 400 times. Monterey County Free Libraries has partnered with the local health departments to lend 300 hotspots to students. Monterey County Free Libraries also provides robust Wi-Fi and is often the only public Wi-Fi in the small rural communities that the library serves. In anticipation of the extended period of distance learning for K-12 students, Hayward Public Library has checked out over 350 tablets and hotspots for 1-year periods to high-need students in

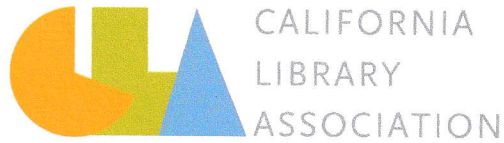


the Hayward Unified School District. As a city with among the lowest median income in the Bay Area, the need for more such loans is still tremendous. Hayward Public Library is also offering online tutoring and learning programs through its Adult Literacy services. Digital literacy is key to continuing adult literacy programs during the pandemic and Hayward Public Library has also distributed 100 Chromebooks, tablets and hotspots to learners on extended loans, and 8 early-learning computers to learners in the Families for Literacy programs. Again the demand is great, in order to continue to fill the needs, the library obtained over 65 refurbished desktop and laptop computers and is offering them to adult literacy learners and Career Online High School participants on extended loan or as part of a learn-to-own program.

During the state's wildfires, libraries were a point of essential community relief, as often they are one of the few locations where the Wi-Fi is functional and residents can check in with loved ones via Facebook and email. In Tehama County, the library has only 10 Chromebooks available for checkout. While the use of the Chromebooks in the library itself is successful due to the library's Wi-Fi signal (and the ability of staff to help patrons trouble-shoot issues on their devices), the county overall has poor internet service or no service at all, and to loan out a Chromebook that cannot successfully go online, does not set up a student or an adult for success. Due to the impact of the fires on the Tehama county community, patrons scrambled to the County Library, which also houses the law library, in order to utilize the court system online, including setting up Zoom court appointments, or filing legal paperwork. Tehama estimates that they would need 30 Chromebooks and hot spots in order to suitably serve its residents.

Finally, through e-Resources sharing, library patrons who are disabled, homebound, or mothers with small children, have been able to secure books and materials at libraries across the state while never having to worry about leaving the safety of their home during the pandemic.

But, as you are aware, not all communities are the same in terms of their broadband capacity – speed and connectivity – as the Tehama example indicates. During the Brown Administration years, CLA, the Corporation for Network Initiatives in California (CENIC), and the State Library were successful in securing several rounds of funding in the State Budget to connect public libraries to CENIC's high-speed, broadband "backbone." Those libraries that have connected to CENIC will tell you it has been a total "game changer" for their communities. While great progress has been made, it is estimated that connecting the rest of the public libraries in the state will take upwards of \$30 million or more. There continue to be large gaps in service in our rural communities and underserved urban communities, where the reach of the library is a necessity. Historically, public libraries have been one of the hardest hit segments of local government in the State Budget, and they still have not been restored to their pre-Recession levels. Indeed, the financial pressures brought about by the coronavirus pandemic, including the patron demands for strong Wi-Fi signals, loaner hotspots, eResources, and loaner Chromebooks, is at unsustainable levels without State assistance.



As the Council moves forward with consideration for revisions to the Action Plan, CLA would strongly request amendments to address the following:

- By providing additional funding to libraries via the California State Library, libraries could expand access to essential digital library resources, including the loaning and lending of laptops and devices. Public libraries are well-positioned to perform this task.
- There is great focus in the Council's Plan and the Order to create greater digital literacy opportunities for all ages. Libraries are the "great equalizer," as they provide training, information, and access to all Californians, regardless of their socio-economic status in a judgement-free environment. Library staff is expertly skilled in addressing literacy issues of most kinds, including digital literacy. Libraries are a key part of meeting the goals identified in the Plan and an investment of financial resources would be necessary for libraries to play this enhanced, critical community role.
- To continue to ensure that all Californians have the benefit of robust, high-speed broadband, every consideration should be made by the Council to provide dedicated funding to the State Library, with the intent that the dollars be used to connect the remaining libraries to CENIC or further enhance their Wi-Fi. This important focus on library connectivity will bring significant returns for the communities that they serve.

Thank you for your consideration of our requests. CLA looks forward to partnering with the Broadband Council in the months ahead, and we hope we can serve as a helpful resource. Please do not hesitate to contact us should you desire any additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jayanti Addleman".

Jayanti Addleman, CLA President  
Director of Library Services, Hayward Public Library

cc: Ms. Stephanie Tom, Deputy Director, Broadband and Digital Literacy,  
Department of Technology  
Christina DiCaro and Mike Dillon, CLA Lobbyists (KP Public Affairs)