

From: DAdamo, Annette x3045
To: [CA Broadband Council](#)
Subject: Monterey County Comment Letter - California State Broadband Action Plan
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Attachments: Monterey County Comment Letter - California State Broadband Action Plan.pdf

California Broadband Council Members:

The attached comment letter on the State Broadband Action Plan is being submitted on behalf of the Monterey County Board of Supervisors.

Annette D'Adamo, *Legislative Coordinator*
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MONTEREY COUNTY



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November 19, 2020

Dear California Broadband Council Members:

On behalf of Monterey County, thank you for the opportunity to provide public comment as you embark on the development of a new State Broadband Action Plan. The Plan includes many elements that can effectively address the critical gaps in online access, device access, and critical skills training in California. It represents an outstanding opportunity to ensure equity is achieved in the ability of all Californians to have access to broadband connectivity.

A lack of internet access disproportionately effects some Monterey County residents because internet access is not available in their area or is unaffordable. In August 2020, a photo of two girls sitting on the sidewalk with their laptops outside a Taco Bell restaurant in the City of Salinas to use the restaurant's Wi-Fi went viral, shining the national spotlight on the digital divide which exists in Monterey County and many other communities in the state and nation. Schools are facing significant challenges which disparately impact students of color. According to the Monterey County Office of Education nearly 7,000 students/families do not have access to the tools they need for distance learning (e.g., laptops or tablets), and over 10,000 students do not have internet access in their home.

The pandemic has underscored the critical utility of broadband infrastructure. From the homework gap and workforce adaptations, to essential healthcare services and e-commerce, broadband is now the keystone to our nation's response to the global pandemic and imperative to building resilient and future-ready communities. The lack of reliable broadband is a major economic barrier and a leading driver of socioeconomic inequality.

Our goal is to ensure that every resident in Monterey County, regardless of their circumstances, can access broadband. The ability to do so will pay dividends far beyond the current crisis we find ourselves in. We respectfully offer the following recommendations as you proceed with the plan.

- 1) **Regulate broadband internet access:** At the state and federal level, the County advocates that broadband internet access is regulated once again as a utility that is necessary for all Californians' daily lives, and supports legislation to reform existing state programs to expand internet access, generate needed revenue and make it easier for local governments to obtain funding to move local projects forward more expeditiously.
- 2) **Require private telecommunication providers to provide more accurate broadband coverage data:** The County supports requiring private telecommunication providers to provide more granular and accurate broadband coverage data and make the data accessible to local government including cities, counties, and school districts. This will help all of us understand our coverage gaps. We need to know who is not connected and to what degree, via these data withheld by private telecommunication providers. We should also conduct surveys, or other exhaustive mechanisms that do not exclude participation based on access.
- 3) **Use resources wisely by leveraging existing networks by public libraries and schools:** There are schools and libraries in virtually every community, with existing gigabit network in place already funded by E-Rate. We encourage you to reach out to your public library and school networks to weave these existing anchor institutions and their networks into the infrastructure of fulfilling the broadband action plan. Libraries and schools are already embedded in all communities including rural communities across California and are already

working on these issues at a statewide level. The existing public library and school networks can serve as the network backbone for a state-wide broadband network.

- 4) Include public libraries more in the planning and use them as community “learning hubs.”:** In the VISION part of the plan, public libraries have a large role to play in Goal #3, with established partnerships and ongoing work in all the identified areas. Libraries are already networked via regional cooperative systems and statewide projects; already work closely with local city and county governments, schools and private partners who are all working to achieve the vision you outline. Yet, in the entire document, libraries are mentioned only once, in a partnership area where we are already strong.

Even after the pandemic, and presuming that education goes back to five days per week in a classroom, students will go back to a deep “homework gap” that already existed and substantially harms learning. Your public libraries were already jammed after school with students needing broadband to complete basic school assignments and learn online as they did not have service or tools at home. Public libraries are also held captive by what is available where they are embedded in rural and poor communities, with many relying still on old infrastructure to serve critical community needs.

Public libraries serve as critical partners in achieving Goal #3 “Devices and Digital Literacy” as we host classes, lend devices, and provide assistance through substantial partnerships. These services are offered at no charge to communities, and classes for seniors, coding for teens, learning to design on an iPad, accessing Veterans benefits, or learning to use Zoom are being adapted through the pandemic, and still fill to capacity. On page 9 of the draft document this is called out specifically.

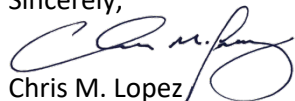
Public libraries and schools can also serve as the technology learning hubs for the community. Adoption of technologies requires both a device and digital literacy. If people don’t have the skills to use broadband, it doesn’t matter if they have access—they won’t be able to access the Internet and the world of opportunities, benefits, and life-changing support it offers. This takes on added urgency as we reach late adopters, who have missed out on much the last two decades of broadband use, experience, and training. We should partner with schools, libraries and various local government programs and educate the community about lifeline programs available to low-income families. Almost all major telecom providers participate in the lifeline programs or offer discounted service to low-income families.

Lastly on this topic, we encourage you to restore funding to the California Library Services Act and engage with the California State Library and California Library Association to create or expand work in the areas you outline.

- 5) Enforce a streamlined permit process with a time frame for permit approvals:** We should help private telecommunication providers by lowering their cost of doing business, by requiring that every local government in the state approve any pending and future broadband permit within a time frame. This statewide permitting time requirement would speed up existing and future broadband permits throughout the state and allow more communities to be served by improved broadband coverage. An example is lack of cell coverage in the Big Sur area in Monterey County. A project was launched by a private service provider several years ago to improve cell coverage in the area but the project is stalled because of delays in permit processing involving another agency.
- 6) Promoting a state-wide “dig once” policy:** We should promote a state-wide “dig once” policy and encourage all local governments to adopt the policy as a local ordinance. The policy will significantly reduce the cost of building out internet access to underserved communities, and it will effectively eliminate the need to dig up recently paved roads to expand broadband infrastructure.

Monterey County looks forward to working with Governor Newsom and the California Broadband Council on finding innovative ways to leverage resources and to ensure more Californians have access to affordable Internet, particularly in rural and underserved communities. Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments.

Sincerely,



Chris M. Lopez
Chair, Board of Supervisors