

COUNTY OF EL DORADO

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June 8, 2021

Dear Legislator,

On behalf of El Dorado County, we urge the immediate passage of the Governor's proposal to invest \$7 billion to make a serious, concentrated effort to close the Digital Divide.

The flexible funding for broadband included in the American Rescue Plan Act and a recent report finding that 100 Mbps fiber can be built to all unserved homes and businesses for less than \$10 billion dollars have created a once-in-a-generation opportunity to connect the unconnected and improve affordability and speeds for all Californians.

A large portion of El Dorado County is rural and broadband access is key to closing the digital divide. It must be a matter of public policy and a priority for economic development, health care, education, agriculture, and social equity. Expanding broadband infrastructure will foster competition and thereby increase affordability.

The Governor's plan would address all of the most serious issues that cause the Digital Divide. It would invest in short-term affordability supports for those with access but without the means to connect. It would commit \$3 billion to last-mile construction efforts in a way specifically designed to leverage further funding from local agencies and service providers.

Perhaps most importantly, the plan would invest in a transformative public infrastructure project to build a statewide open access middle mile network, which would reduce the costs for all last-mile projects, giving the state a bigger bang for its buck. But beyond that significant benefit, a statewide open access middle mile network is also the only long-term solution to the issues of universal service and affordability. It would make it more cost-effective and therefore more likely for new service providers to build into communities—representing about half of all connections statewide—suffering under a local broadband monopoly.

Using the state's financial resources to expand broadband is a public good that is both moral and practical, but also urgent. The best time to close the Digital Divide was 20 years ago, but the second best time is now, not next year or two years from now. Committing \$7 billion to this effort would be the state's most serious effort yet to try to close the Digital Divide.

Respectfully,

John Hidahl
Chair, Board of Supervisors
County of El Dorado

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