



Legislation Text

File #: 15-0248, **Version:** 1

Chief Administrative Office, Economic Development Division, recommending the Board approve and authorize the Chair to sign a letter to the Rural County Representatives of California in support of extending their county-wide broadband expansion efforts under the Gold Country Broadband Consortium work.

Background

The Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC) is a thirty-four member county strong service organization that champions policies on behalf of California's rural counties. One of the many efforts RCRC is involved with is working with the Rural and Urban Regional Broadband Consortia to expand broadband to rural (and urban) areas and to provide digital literacy outreach and programs.

Some of the items on the agenda for the consortia include:

Expand broadband to rural areas of California - The statewide goal is to achieve 98% deployment with an 80% home adoption by 2017, with no single demographic group or region below 70%. Rural counties are currently at a 75% statewide adoption rate but certain demographics fall well below that rate such as those who are 65 or older (47%), household income of less than \$20,000 (53%), people with disabilities (59%). Roughly 1/4 of Californians do not have Internet at home, however, the adoption rate is up from 55% in 2008 and the consortia and partnering agencies have a lot to do with increasing that average. They will continue to increase that number with continued funding through 2016/2017.

Continue to provide digital literacy - something that is still lacking in low-income communities. Many low-income families access the Internet solely by way of a mobile device. It is very difficult if not impossible to apply for jobs and do homework on a smart phone.

Farmers need greater broadband access - this is a big focus for 2015/2016 and beyond. New agricultural technologies allow for more efficient water use, better farming practices, and increased yields. 70% of farms have Internet access but 33% of those farms are using connections (dial-up, satellite, mobile) that are not adequate for accessing and delivering the large quantities of data associated with some precision ag/smart farming processes.

Telehealth is on the rise - the consortia has and continues to work on deployment to the medically underserved and rural Californians. Telehealth is changing the way caregivers provide health services. From, helping patients record daily symptoms to monitoring diabetes, physicians are implementing telehealth to give their patients the opportunity to manage their own health while at the same time allowing physicians the chance to monitor their progress indirectly. This will increase prevention and lower re-admission costs as well as cutting down on carbon emission trips to the doctor or hospital.

Broadband is a big economic development and community sustainability issue. In order to drive businesses into smaller communities and improve local economies, a robust broadband

infrastructure is needed. The consortia has been working and continues to work on this as a top priority to help regions turn in quality infrastructure grant applications in the foreseeable future.

Reason for Recommendation

RCRC has contacted its member counties support needed for continuing the important work of the Rural and Urban Regional Broadband Consortia. Further deployment is needed to provide access to under-served and un-served areas for residential and business usage. Farmers need it to access technology for better and more efficient use of water and farming practices. Small businesses need it to take advantage of the newest technologies for the success of their businesses. Residents need it for access to health care, leisure, and educational opportunities.

The California Public Utilities Commission authorized the California Advanced Services Fund (CASF) on December 20, 2007, by adopting D.07-12-054 in accordance with Public Utilities (P.U.) Code § 701. The CASF provides grants to “telephone corporations” as defined under P.U. Code § 234 to bridge the “digital divide” in unserved and underserved areas in the state. With an initial funding of \$100 million, the CASF supports projects that will a) provide broadband services to areas currently without broadband access and b) build out facilities in underserved areas.

RCRC has developed and submitted a request to legislative counsel asking for urgency legislation that would allow a transfer of \$5-6 million from the CASF Revolving Loan Account into the Regional Consortia Account so that the work of the consortia can be sustained for two more years. RCRC has asked member counties for support in this effort. There will still be some funding left in the state's Revolving Loan Fund account, a fund that is not currently utilized effectively due to many barriers, which the Regional Consortia are helping to address.

Clerk of the Board Follow Up Actions

Obtain Chair signature on the letter of support and submit to RCRC.

Contact

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