



California State
Association of Counties



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Statewide Coalition Calls for \$8 Billion in Immediate Funding to Help Close Digital Divide

Bold Broadband Investment Will Improve Health, Equity, Education and Economy

SACRAMENTO – A cross-sector coalition [urges Governor Gavin Newsom](#) to connect Californians with a one-time, \$8 billion investment in high speed 100 Mbps broadband infrastructure and programs. The broad-based group representing education, health, local government and economic policy organizations believe bold investment in broadband infrastructure and support services is critical to improving health, equity, education and the economy statewide now and for years to come.

The coalition includes California Association of School Business Officials, the California Hospital Association, California Forward Action Fund, California School Boards Association, California State Association of Counties, Rural County Representatives of California, Small School Districts' Association and the Urban Counties of California.

A [recent report](#) commissioned by the CPUC found the cost of building future-proof fiber connections to every unserved building and house in the state would be \$6.8 billion. Included in the budget ask is \$2.2 billion to construct a statewide middle-mile network with open access fiber and \$4.6 billion to provide 100/10 Mbps fiber optics to buildings and houses currently without it.

Either of these pieces—known as the middle mile or the last mile—would be insufficient if implemented alone. Together, they can transform the educational, economic, and quality-of-life landscape statewide by providing unconnected properties access to reliable broadband. The investment also includes \$1.2 billion for broadband adoption programs including devices, digital skills training, service subsidies, and language access necessary for Californians to be able to use the broadband service available in schools, homes and businesses.

The funding request complements, rather than competes with, several important bills currently pending in the Legislature. AB 14 and SB 4 would make important reforms to the CPUC's broadband infrastructure subsidy program and authorize a \$1 billion revenue bond. Additionally, AB 34 would place a broadband bond on the November 2022 ballot.

With 8.4 million California residents without broadband subscriptions and a disproportionate rate of underserved rural, tribal and communities of color, this one-time investment represents a serious effort to make substantial progress on closing the digital divide, setting the stage for California to once again be a leader in digital access.

QUOTES FROM COALITION PARTNERS:

“The time is now to lay a foundation that removes the barriers that have systematically denied access to connectivity to our most vulnerable students and families,” said Tatia Davenport, CEO of the California Association of School Business Officials. “This request is our opportunity to implement a strategic vision that will have a significant, meaningful and long-lasting benefit to our 6.1 million students and California communities.”

“Access to reliable internet is as essential to modern life as electricity or indoor plumbing,” said CSAC First Vice President and Siskiyou County Supervisor Ed Valenzuela. “Statewide investment in broadband is long overdue and will ensure equitable access to public health, public safety, education, entrepreneurship and economic opportunities regardless of geography or population.”

“By investing in broadband, we are investing in our communities, our economy and the future of our state,” said Micah Weinberg, Director, California Forward Action Fund. “We can no longer afford inaction and the California Forward Action Fund is proud to join this broad coalition in requesting a one-time investment that is a critical start to building the infrastructure needed to serve all Californians.”

“Our children shouldered the heavy burden of staying home and adjusting their way of learning completely in order to keep us safe,” said Urban Counties of California Board Chair and Santa Clara County Supervisor Susan Ellenberg. “They missed out on so many childhood milestones – first day of school, first year, graduations and friendships. It is our imperative to honor this great sacrifice. Investing in the support structures they need for this new way of learning is not only the right thing to do but also the smart one; it's an investment in our future.”

“The push to bridge California’s digital divide is a push for greater equity in every corner of the state,” said Carmela Coyle, President and CEO of the California Hospital Association. “This is especially important for health care, as the COVID-19 pandemic has brought into stark relief longstanding health disparities that can no longer be ignored. As we build for the future of health care, one that will increasingly rely on new technologies like telehealth, it’s vital that all communities have equitable access to these new methods of care.”

“The lack of equitable investment in reliable high-speed internet isn’t strictly a rural issue,” RCRC Chair Stacy Corless states. “Too many communities throughout the state continue to suffer the consequences of a system that has prioritized profit over fair access to this essential service. We, as a state, must invest in robust and ubiquitous broadband for all Californians.”

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