

January 22, 2021

The Honorable Lena Gonzalez
California State Senator
State Capitol, Room 2068
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Cecilia Aguiar-Curry
California State Assemblymember
State Capitol, Room 5144
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Support of SB 4 (Gonzalez) and AB 14 (Aguiar-Curry)

Dear Senator Gonzalez and Assemblymember Aguiar-Curry:

On behalf of the California Forward Action Fund, the California Economic Summit, and members of the California Stewardship Network, we are pleased to support both your efforts to close the Digital Divide in the state as reflected in Senate Bill 4 and Assembly Bill 14. We continue to urge the Legislature to swiftly support the alignment, protection, and passage of important statutory changes and increased funding to help meet the state's significant deployment and adoption needs. We applaud the authors for their commitment to work closely together in the 2021 legislative session and ensure the state is successful in addressing the growing crisis.

California Forward is a nonprofit dedicated to the inclusive, sustainable well-being of all people in the state, which includes having access to adequate broadband service. The COVID 19 pandemic – with the ensuing freefall of jobs and businesses and shift to virtual schooling – and the proliferation of wildfires in the state have turned the Digital Divide into a grave crisis and a civil rights issue. Further, these events have demonstrated that the Internet is an essential service for all members of our communities and will be an underlying factor in the state's economic recovery and resiliency. Adequate broadband services are important for our most vulnerable Californians including those who are low-income, living in rural areas, and Black or Latino.

We join our partners including the California Emerging Technology Fund, Valley Vision, the Inland Empire Regional Broadband Consortium, California School Boards Association, Fresno State Connect Initiative, and others in support of the "*California Advanced Services Fund Consensus Principles for Action*" developed and supported by these partners. As the bills progress, we urge you to prioritize the following actions:

- Authorize CASF extended collections (no less than \$100M per year for at least 15 years) sufficient to net \$1B in Infrastructure Account with revenue bonds to "bring forward the future" to invest now in high-speed Internet infrastructure to jumpstart economic recovery.
- Prioritize rural unserved areas (including Tribal Lands) and urban poor underserved neighborhoods (regardless of speed thresholds and definitions).
- Set threshold speeds consistent with the Broadband for All Action Plan.

- Require fiber middle-mile infrastructure construction with performance-based end-user speeds sufficient to support distance learning and telehealth (dynamic standard for CPUC).
- Allow connection of all anchor institutions along the path of deployment in the spirit of “dig once” and “dig smart” policies (fair cost-sharing determined by CPUC).
- Require open access middle mile for all subsidized projects and allow funding for ISPs and signals into fields for ag tech along path of deployment.
- Develop a process for incumbent ISPs to “step up or step aside” with limited challenges to optimize use of existing infrastructure and cost-effective CASF grants.
- Establish explicit right to apply for Tribes and Public Agencies: Local Governments; Special Districts; JPAs; LEAs (School Districts, COEs, Community College Districts).
- Prioritize Infrastructure grants that drive to achieve goal of at least 98% deployment in reach region (build at scale for economic efficiencies instead of cherry picking).
- Streamline approvals and permitting for all deployment by prioritizing CASF grants (public sector to approve and permit at the speed of private-sector construction).
- Dedicate funding for all CASF Accounts and improve administrative efficiencies.
- Empower Regional Consortia to engage Local Governments to adopt policies and enact permit streamlining to accelerate broadband deployment and adoption.

Your leadership is necessary and powerful, and we look forward to working with both your offices to ensure that the above critical elements are adopted. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns at micah@cafwd.org or our Government Affairs consultant, Veronica Villalobos Cruz at veronica@cafwd.org.







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cc: Authors, Principal Coauthors and Coauthors of SB 4 and AB 14