

May 21, 2024

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR JANICE HAHN

Support for Assembly Bill 1588 the Affordable Internet and Net Equality Act of 2024

The need for access to reliable internet has become more prevalent for a person to improve their quality of life in our society. The internet is an enormous network of websites and information that span the globe, and broadband provides access to this information through a home router. This technology has seeped into almost every aspect of life and changed the way we behave and operate. From communication and transportation to healthcare and connectivity, technology has enhanced our lives for the better. However, this ever-evolving technology is not equitably distributed as over half of Californians without broadband at home cannot afford market prices or do not own a computer. Additionally, there are no broadband programs to support families at risk of losing their service. According to the latest California State Broadband Action Plan, broadband affordability remains a large challenge to achieving broadband for all in the state, especially for low-income households.

There has been state and federal action to increase internet speeds, expand access to essential Wi-Fi routers, improve connectivity for schools and libraries in underserved areas, and efforts to sign up eligible households for broadband service. The Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) is a federal program that has made significant strides towards closing the digital divide by offering a discount of up to \$30 per month toward internet service and up to \$75 per month for households on qualifying Tribal Lands. The ACP also provided a one-time discount of

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up to \$100 toward the purchase of a laptop, desktop computer, or tablet from participating internet companies. Over 23 million eligible households have enrolled in this program. However, the \$14.2 billion Congress initially made available for the ACP is running out. Due to the lack of additional funding for the ACP, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has announced that April 2024 will be the last month ACP households will receive the full ACP discount. ACP households may receive a partial ACP discount in May 2024, but the benefit will be discontinued unless Congress provides additional funding. As a result, the FCC has initiated steps to wind-down the ACP.

The Affordable Internet and Net Equality Act of 2024 seeks to ensure California continues to be a national leader in Digital Inclusion. AB 1588 (Wilson) would essentially codify ACP provisions to ensure internet service provider (ISP) accountability and provide stability for California households affected by the federal policy change. This bill will ensure vulnerable communities across the state are not left behind by requiring the state and state agencies to only do business with an ISP that offers affordable home internet service to households participating in certain public assistance programs. AB 1588 would require that the affordable offer costs no more than \$40 per month and meets specified minimum internet speed requirement. AB 1588 has the ability to further develop and expand broadband infrastructure and reliable, affordable networks to bridge the digital divide, provide connectivity and services, increase access to high-speed internet to benefit as many households as possible, and ensure digital inclusion, particularly in underserved communities.

Closing the digital divide benefits everyone, not just the disconnected. Los Angeles County (County) has advocated for fully funding for the ACP in any government funding package to reflect the President's Fiscal Year 2024 emergency supplemental funding request. If ACP funding is not extended, there is no requirement for ISPs to continue offering the existing affordable plans. The County is committed to closing the digital divide and AB 1588 will bridge the gap as Congress continues their work around developing a permanent funding pathway for this critical broadband program. Communities without sufficient internet connectivity struggle to keep pace in a rapidly changing world increasingly dependent on technology.

I, **THEREFORE, MOVE** that the Board of Supervisors direct the Chief Executive Office Legislative Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations branch to Support Assembly Bill 1588 (Wilson).

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