



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE OAKLAND BRANCH

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California Public Utilities Commission
Public Advisor's Office
505 Van Ness Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94102

Dear CPUC Commission,

As president of the Oakland Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), it has always been my concern to assist those who are forgotten or overlooked and to support and work closely with individuals who care about creating a more just and equitable community.

Since its inception, the NAACP has promoted education as a pathway to opportunity. All too often, however, factors outside students' control - most notably, centuries of inequitable policies - deprive Black students of the resources they deserve to access the education they deserve. When the pandemic hit Oakland in March of 2020 and Oakland public schools suddenly transitioned into distance learning, the existing disparities in digital access were laid bare and the injustice became too visible for the State to ignore.

For weeks, the school district - aided by community-based organizations like the NAACP - searched tirelessly for students who lacked digital access and for families financially disconnected due to the economic downturn. Oakland rallied to resource emergency stopgap measures: school-loaned computers, refurbished devices, internet hotspots, and technical support to tens of thousands of Oakland students and families. Despite these odds, Black students continue to harness the wisdom and resilience of our community to navigate a system not designed for their success. Many students went to great lengths to access learning, attending classes in McDonald's parking lots to access adequate Wifi or attending community learning pods amidst the height of the pandemic. But it doesn't have to be this way.

These temporary solutions, however, have failed to address the underlying causes of the digital divide. Decades of divestment from marginalized communities has withheld access to the capital infrastructure to build reliable, sustainable broadband solutions.

As we move forward in this rapidly growing age of technology, I am very concerned about the underrepresented population of Blacks and growing divide between the haves and have-nots. It is imperative that those who are at a disadvantage be provided equal technological resources to close the gap. Not providing them with equitable resources will lead to a widening racial economic divide.

SB 156 has the potential to make the most progress towards closing the digital divide in our state's history, but only if middle mile fiber is laid in communities like ours, long overlooked by private investment. Highway I-880 and Route 185 (International Boulevard) bisects our most under-resourced, predominantly BIPOC communities, yet it is ostensibly absent from CPUC's proposed map. Without state investment in our community, our families will continue to rely on the commercial internet hotspots our school district distributed as a stopgap solution. The connection from these hotspots can average speeds below 5 Mbps, hardly enough to run the types of applications and learning software necessary to prepare our students for college and career, and well below the 100 Mbps threshold in SB 156. Additionally, OUSD likely does not have the financial resources to ensure these devices stay funded on once supplemental COVID funds expire. The time for meaningful investment is now.

Open access, state owned middle mile fiber along the I-880 or International Boulevard (a state highway) could be used to deploy wireless last mile connection that extends into my families' homes, giving them access to higher speeds at costs low enough to ensure Oakland closes to digital divide for good. The availability of this service would spur investment in our community and bring opportunities for families and students alike.

Installation should be guided by two principles: future-proofing and maximum flexibility. Since the majority of the cost of fiber projects is incurred during excavation, CPUC should add additional conduit for future expansions, and pull at least 488 count to start. The conduit design should support future network scenarios by adding splice points and handholes at every major intersection or other likely future hub locations.

CPUC should prioritize areas that have been historically marginalized and dense population centers that offer the greatest return on investment. A five to ten mile stretch of fiber line through my district could support connectivity of tens of thousands of my constituents who for too long have been left behind amidst Silicon Valley's economic boom. Include I-880 from Oakland's Downtown south to Route 185 (International Boulevard) through East Oakland and into San Leandro on your next map.

It will take a great deal of concern and effort of the Oakland community to ensure that SB 156 Middle Mile benefits is distributed equally. To ensure a positive outcome of distribution throughout the City of Oakland - Do what is right! Do what is equitable by the people of Oakland!

Sincerely,



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