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California State Senate

SENATOR
ANNA M. CABALLERO
TWELFTH SENATE DISTRICT



CHAIR
BUDGET SUBCOMMITTEE
#4 ON STATE ADMINISTRATION
AND GENERAL GOVERNMENT

CHAIR
SELECT COMMITTEE ON
PREPARING CALIFORNIA'S
FUTURE WORKFORCE

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BANKING AND FINANCIAL
INSTITUTIONS
HOUSING
NATURAL RESOURCES
AND WATER

October 27, 2021

California Public Utilities Commission
President Marybel Batjer
505 Van Ness Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94102

Submitted via email

Dear President Batjer:

I write to you regarding the implementation of Senate Bill 156, California's historic middle-mile broadband investment.

The first draft of the middle mile map does not include for a middle-mile infrastructure investment the west-side region of Fresno County that sits inside my Senate District 12. This area includes disadvantaged communities like Firebaugh, Mendota, San Joaquin, and Tranquility, which are agriculture economic dependent areas that deliver to California and the country a significant yield of fresh fruits and vegetables.

This past year, I authored and worked closely with the CPUC to deliver Senate Bill 28, a small step forward that allows the CPUC to gather granular data about digital infrastructure from exiting TV providers. I focused on this fight for broadband equality when I returned to the legislature in 2017, because rural and poor communities I represent lacked broadband back then, prior to the pandemic. The lack of broadband infrastructure impact to students, healthcare, business, and the economy was the same then as it is now – devastating. The pandemic encouraged a robust state response to this lack of broadband infrastructure to unserved and underserved communities – a problem that has plagued the west-side of the San Joaquin valley for years - but somehow left from its plans this region that showcases the exact use case for the SB 156 middle-mile build out. Without including this region in the middle-mile infrastructure plans, these disadvantaged communities will be, forever, left behind any semblance of modern opportunities and lifestyles.

Some of the state's largest production food providers are located in this region, and are in dire need of broadband infrastructure to be able to deploy agriculture technology, so that they can grow food while meeting the state's regulatory requirements to use less water, energy, fertilizer, and pesticides. This will only happen with the widespread adoption of

agriculture technology that necessitates ubiquitous broadband on the farm. Supporting the agriculture economy is, of course, just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to reasons why the west-side of the San Joaquin valley needs middle mile infrastructure. Communities like Mendota are trying to work with the Fresno County Sheriff to reduce gang related violence, but have been unable to complete a public safety project because insufficient broadband prevents a video alert system from properly working.

All of these communities struggled to keep their students connected to their school during the pandemic, and simply without middle mile infrastructure delivering real broadband networks, this part of Central Valley sits stagnant, as the state modernizes infrastructure elsewhere. Whether for elementary age students in Firebaugh, or West Hills Community College students, schools and homes need to be connected to real high speed infrastructure, and not be dependent on temporary solutions like cellular hot spots. Without a local fiber backbone, hotspots that some service providers made available early in the pandemic proved to be a failing strategy for a vast majority of San Joaquin valley residents.

Thank you for your attention to my concerns. My staff, Peter Ansel at 916-651-4012 or peter.ansel@sen.ca.gov, is available to discuss further.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Anna M. Caballero" with a stylized flourish at the end.

Anna M. Caballero
12th Senate District

cc: Martha Guzman Aceves, Commissioner
Clifford Rechtschaffen, Commissioner
Genevieve Shiroma, Commissioner
Darcie Houck, Commissioner