



County of Santa Cruz

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BOARD CALLS FOR FCC ACTION ON LIFELINE BROADBAND

The Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors this week voted to help close the “digital divide” by urging the federal government to create a program making it easier for families to obtain low-cost broadband services.

One in six county households – or 16.1 percent -- do not have a broadband connection, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. That figure is nearly identical to the County’s poverty rate of 15.3 percent, and studies consistently show that the poor, seniors and the disabled are more likely to lack broadband access. Nationwide, less than half of low-income households have broadband access in their homes.

Yet increasingly, digital literacy and access are a foundation of modern life. Broadband access is necessary to submit job applications, organize and attend meetings or hand in homework assignments. The Federal Communications Commission is currently considering a proposal to expand its Lifeline program to broadband services, which would provide low-income households with an affordable way to purchase broadband services.

The County of Santa Cruz is committed to helping all residents access the services they need at an affordable price. In that spirit, the County is joining others across California, as well as the California Emerging Technology Fund, in an effort to help close the “digital divide.”

“If we are to continue our efforts to create an environment where people can live and work in our county, where our children have access to better educational opportunities, and our workforce can continue to improve their professional skills, it is important that the changes envisioned by the Federal Communications Commission be adopted,” Supervisor Zach Friend



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said. “Such an action will help bridge the digital divide and ensure that Internet access is not limited to just those with the financial means to support it.”

At Friend’s request, the Board voted unanimously to send a letter to the FCC supporting the expansion of the Lifeline program, which was originally created to give low-income households telephone access. The proposal is pending.

In June, the National Association of Counties honored Santa Cruz County for its efforts to improve broadband infrastructure through a series of policy changes. Led by Friend, those changes include a “dig once” policy installing fiber conduit whenever public rights-of-way are broached, a revision of permitting fees, streamlining permits for fiber infrastructure, establishing common technical specifications for broadband infrastructure projects, creating a master lease agreement for companies interested in locating their infrastructure on County assets, and the development of a Broadband Master Plan.