

Mr. Ryan Dulin
Director of Communications Division
California Public Utilities Commission
505 Van Ness Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94102

**RE: Comments by The Broadband Alliance of Mendocino County and Access Sonoma
Broadband on comments submitted by Tom West on Draft Resolution T-17443**

Dear Mr. Dulin:

Thank you for this opportunity to “comment on the comments” that have been submitted on Draft Resolution T-17443. Input from the public on matters of public policy is of critical concern to the functioning of our democracy, for it allows decision-makers to hear directly from the people who are impacted by the policies that are implemented at the state and national levels.

The Broadband Alliance of Mendocino County and Access Sonoma Broadband represent two grassroots groups which have been working to close the Digital Divide in their respective counties. Both groups conduct their business with the full support of their respective Boards of Supervisors, and include active participation from leadership at various levels including Economic Development Boards, local broadband/network providers, and citizens.

We specifically support three key recommendations from Mr. West’s comments submitted to the CPUC on June 10th, 2014. The recommendations brought forth by CPUC staff in DR T-17443 show a strong and determined effort to address some of the problems that have prevented the CASF broadband infrastructure fund from reaching more areas of unserved and underserved households of California, and we support these changes, but in some instances we believe the recommendations do not go far enough.

The Communications Division asked currently existing regional consortia to determine priority areas for broadband projects in each of their regions in fulfillment of SB 740. This is appropriate, as the regional consortia are the “eyes and ears” on the ground and have the expertise and an in-depth knowledge of their area to produce priority area listings. The BAMC and ASB participated in this process through their respective consortia, and together included 22 areas of unserved and underserved areas of their counties for inclusion. However, when the

CPUC exercised its high-level validation based on the California Broadband Availability Map, 17 of these project areas were designated as “served.” Mr. West carefully detailed the technology used for designation, and we note many of these areas received this “served” designation based on provider self-reported mobile wireless advertised coverage only. This is problematic in our two counties for a number of reasons, including the rugged terrain and varied topography, which prevents a consistent and reliable signal for mobile coverage in many areas. A particular house may receive a signal, while the house next-door may not. We’ve all encountered the issue of driving along major highway corridors within our counties and discovering that many times one cannot maintain adequate connectivity for a mobile conversation. Mr. West also brought up the important point that a signal *outside* a building does not necessarily mean that the signal is available *inside* the building.

Our approach to solving a problem is to first define that a problem exists. We believe the Draft Resolution does not highlight the mobile discrepancy in the “served” designations of priority areas, nor cite same as a major finding. This ‘served’ designation is of critical importance, as it determines whether an area is considered valid for CASF funding and whether or not an application is likely to receive challenges. Considering the amount of effort and resources that must be expended to submit a CASF application, potential applicants may not submit an application that is likely to be challenged or denied, even if in reality the area is underserved or unserved.

Therefore, the BAMC and ASB fully support Mr. West’s first recommendation:

It recommended that the Resolution include a new finding that cites the fact that regional consortia/unrepresented counties and the broadband providers currently disagree in 114 instances as to whether an area is served or underserved or unserved.

After the problem is recognized, Mr. West then proposes a process for resolving this disparity by recommending the various stakeholders meet and come to an agreement regarding the designation of these priority areas. We agree that resolving these differences would be beneficial to all involved and move us closer to the goal of closing the Digital Divide. We therefore also support Mr. West’s 2nd key recommendation:

It is also recommended that for each of these 114 priority areas the regional consortia/unrepresented counties be required to work together with broadband providers to reconcile these differences.

Given the importance of the process to reconcile these differences, it naturally flows that the first round of applications should be delayed so that the reconciliation process is completed. We therefore also support Mr. West’s third recommendation:

It is also recommended the CPUC set the first acceptance of applications for January 1, 2015, not October 1, 2014 to give all parties sufficient time to implement all the orders.

Respectfully Submitted,



Mike Nicholls
Co-Chair, Access Sonoma Broadband
County



Jim Moorehead
Chair Broadband Alliance of Mendocino