

## **Mendocino County Broadband Alliance wants better landline connections**

### **Commissioner Sandoval to present proposal to state commission**

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Mendocino County's Broadband Alliance Chairwoman Trish Steel and Fifth District Supervisor Dan Hamburg will meet in San Francisco Wednesday, Nov. 30, to discuss rural connection issues with California Public Utilities commissioners.

Commissioner Catherine Sandoval, who has advocated for rural communities, held a public participation meeting in Ukiah this July to find out what problems need solving in the area. With that community input, along with the input from several counties, Sandoval put together a Proposed Decision to put before the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) on Dec. 12. In the Proposed Decision, she points out two main issues, "call completion" and "dial tone access."

Rural call completion, which applies to Mendocino and its neighboring counties, is a problem when someone in a city tries to call someone in a rural area, but the call doesn't go through. And lack of dial tone access is prevalent in Mendocino County, during an outage or some other connection failure, often during rain.

Mendocino County Sheriff Tom Allman and Willits Police Chief Gerry Gonzalez spoke at the meeting in July about the 2014 outage caused by an accident on Comptche-Ukiah Rd. Telephone, Internet, cell and 9-1-1 services for about eight coastline communities went down and 400 feet of AT&T fiber optic cable was destroyed. The Willits Police Department's Voiceover Internet Protocol (VoIP) system went down, making it impossible for people to call 9-1-1. And Gonzalez said most of the staff had switched from copper-wired landlines to cell phones.

"Even if we did have existing lines there that were working, people couldn't call in," he said.

In light of these issues, Sandoval wants the commission's Consumer Affairs Branch to offer those who spoke at the public participation meeting informal resolution services and give them the opportunity to file a formal complaint with the commission. In short, she wants people in areas with frequent connection problems to get some help.

Steel and Hamburg's goal for the Nov. 30 meeting is to discuss Sandoval's Proposed Decision with other commissioners in order to get their support when it comes time to vote. She needs three votes to carry the measure through. Steel said big cable and telephone companies, like AT&T, will be strongly lobbying against it, but she hopes that Mendocino County's recent "party" status under the CPUC will help them get the votes. The CPUC granted them party status in January, giving them the ability to present evidence and witnesses, obtain information from other parties and file motions and petitions. Steel said party status gives their voice more weight.

Sandoval's term is up in December. Steel has sent out a petition to Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr. to reappoint her. She and the North Bay/North Coast Broadband Consortium wrote letters in her favor.

“It’s more important than ever for people to contact the Governor’s Office to support her,” Steel said.

The Broadband Alliance is still seeking signatures for the petition. They hope that with Sandoval’s reappointment, more work will be done to improve broadband in Mendocino County.

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