

September 8th, 2016

Governor Jerry Brown
State Capitol, Suite 1173
Sacramento, California 95814

Subject: Recommend re-appointment of Commissioner Catherine J.K. Sandoval to the Public Utilities Commission

Dear Governor Brown;

On behalf of the Broadband Alliance of Mendocino County (BAMC), I am requesting that PUC Commissioner Catherine J.K. Sandoval be re-appointed for another term on the commission when her current term ends in December of this year.

The Broadband Alliance is the established voice of Mendocino County residents on issues of broadband advocacy and universal deployment. We are a small rural county only three hours north of Silicon Valley, but where many residents still reside in “digital darkness.” Mountainous rugged terrain, dense forests and low population all present challenges to broadband deployment. The BAMC formed in 2010 to coordinate the efforts of individuals and communities frustrated with trying to live 21st century lives with 20th century infrastructure. We are an ad hoc committee of the Economic Development and Financing Corporation, in collaboration with the Community Foundation of Mendocino County, the Mendocino Coast Broadband Alliance, and the Mendocino County Board of Supervisors.

These past six years we have worked with providers, legislators and the PUC; progress has been limited while it seems the challenges are ever-present; However, working with public officials such as Commissioner Sandoval gives us hope. She has proven herself to be a committed advocate to rural communities, providing strong

support for the state program for last-mile broadband deployment, the California Advanced Services Fund (CASF). She has traveled to the rural areas of the state to see “on the ground” conditions, and took leadership when she heard about Mendocino County’s concerns on service quality and its impacts on public safety by scheduling a Public Participation Hearing so that these concerns could be documented and addressed by the PUC.

Many areas of the state have made strong progress towards ubiquitous broadband with newer technologies, but unfortunately there are many rural, tribal, and less densely populated areas that have not made progress and are being left behind. And worse yet, legacy services are being neglected and withdrawn before newer alternative services are in place, creating holes in what was once our strong public safety network. These are the issues that are of great concern to the residents in rural counties, and yet it seems our policy-makers in Sacramento are not aware of these issues. This is the reason that Mendocino petitioned to be part of the PUC Rural Call Completion Proceeding.

As the commissioner in charge of this proceeding, Commissioner Sandoval scheduled the Public Participation Hearing in our county seat of Ukiah in July so she could hear first-hand the concerns from the residents of the county. The hearing was scheduled for 2:30-4:30 pm, but because of the large turn-out, the hearing lasted until well past 6 pm. Commissioner Sandoval listened intently to every speaker, often asking clarifying questions and making sure the information was recorded correctly for follow-up. She showed the utmost respect for each speaker and thanked them for taking the time and participating. Even after 6 pm on this Friday night, when their staff was both hungry and needed to get on the road because of another Public Participation Hearing the next day 243 miles further north in Humboldt County, she continued to give every resident the chance to have their say.

This was on top of a day that started early that morning when the Commissioner met with local residents, CWA workers, and supervisors for a county tour to the site of a 2014 fiber break that took out telecommunications to 8 communities in Mendocino for 45 hours. She wanted to understand why it happened, what conditions caused

the break, and what the area looked like now. Understand, this break occurred on a remote windy road, so this was a long, difficult 5 hour round-trip tour (in which we had to stop the vans because people got car-sick). The county provided vans for our use, and during this time the commissioner asked questions of everyone in the van, especially the CWA workers, to understand the technical aspects of what we were seeing. She met with the local volunteer Fire Department (the first responders on the scene) to hear what happened, and how they coped with the outage. She understood how potentially devastating these outages are to small rural communities because she **gets out of her office and talks to the people** who are on the ground and impacted by the practices of the corporations that are regulated by the PUC. Her concern is genuine, refreshing and rare; we need public servants such as Commissioner Sandoval who will work hard for the people of California. She travels around the state on grueling schedules to meet in the most remote tribal areas because she understands that these are the residents who cannot come to Sacramento, so she comes to them. She is their voice in Sacramento.

We would like to share an example of her concern. During this van trip in Ukiah, a member of the Mendocino NBNCBC team spoke of the many areas without cellular coverage, and how when telephone outages occur residents are left in dire situations. She mentioned one instance she knew of where a 70 year old woman had to climb out on the roof of her house because it was the only place on her property where she could get enough of a signal to make a phone call. Several days later the Mendocino team manager received an email from Commissioner Sandoval herself, asking for the name, address and phone number of this woman. She stated, “We want to make sure she has reliable landline service, so she doesn't have to climb the roof to report outages.” This is the type of follow-up that we consistently see with Commissioner Sandoval, and why we trust her at the PUC. We know that she will do her utmost to fight for consumer protections and continued funding for programs such as the CASF.

Public safety is of critical importance to rural counties, and we ask that on the PUC we have representation from commissioners who understand our needs because

they have spoken to the people who live there. Mendocino County Sheriff Tom Allman opened his public testimony in July by thanking Commissioner Sandoval for being here, and stated, “We’re glad that we’re not forgotten as a part of California ...sometimes rural counties often feel like the step-child where resources are expended.”

The chair of the Mendocino County Fire Chiefs Communications Committee, Randy MacDonald of the Comptche Fire Department, ended his testimony by asking two questions: “Is the policy of the state of California that rural lives are not as important as urban or suburban lives? How and when will state agencies ensure that telecommunications companies provide geographical equity in essential services?” As rural lives *are* as important as urban/suburban lives, we need a PUC commissioner who we trust will do all she can to make sure that the public safety needs of ALL Californians are represented at 501 Van Ness Avenue.

Please re-appoint Commissioner Catherine J.K. Sandoval to another term as a PUC Commissioner.

Respectfully,



Trish Steel
Chair of the Executive Committee
Broadband Alliance of Mendocino County

cc:

Senate Rules Committee
Congressman Huffman
Senator Mike McGuire
Assemblymember Jim Wood
US Senator Barbara Boxer
US Senator Diane Feinstein
Mark Toney, The Utilities Reform Network Executive Director
Dan Hamburg, Mendocino County Supervisor
Sunne McPeak, President CETF