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**BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION
OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA**

*Order Instituting Rulemaking Regarding
Broadband Infrastructure Deployment and
to Support Service Providers in the State of
California*

Rulemaking 20-09-001

**REPLY COMMENTS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ACTION COMMITTEE
OF THE SANTA CLARA COUNTY SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION
ON ASSIGNED COMMISSIONER RULING COMMENTS BY THE SANTA
CLARA COUNTY DIGITAL EQUITY CONSORTIUM**

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September 21, 2021

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I. Introduction

Pursuant to the Assigned Commissioner's Ruling issued on August 6 2021 (Middle Mile Ruling) and the extension of time granted pursuant to Administrative Law Judge Glegola's August 20, 2021 email ruling extending the deadline for reply comments by one week, the Legislative Action Committee (LAC) of the Santa Clara County School Board Association (SCCSBA) submits the following comments in response to opening comments submitted by the Santa Clara County Digital Equity Consortium submitted on September 3, 2021.

II. Discussion

The LAC advocates for the well-being of over 260,000 public school students enrolled in thirty-one elementary, high school, and unified school districts across Santa Clara County. Approximately 35% of our students are classified as socio-economically disadvantaged. We have seen the impacts of the lack of Internet access on our students and their families first-hand during the COVID-19 pandemic; the achievement gap increased over the last eighteen months in part because our most vulnerable students had trouble connecting to school via the Internet. Last year,

teachers had a virtual glimpse into student homes, and students likewise saw teachers' homes. Barriers that were mostly invisible contributors to the achievement gap were suddenly laid bare for educators. For students who were able to connect to distance learning consistently, school provided continuity and routine during a time of uncertainty - a lighthouse in a troubled time which our students without Internet access were unable to benefit from. For students with limited or unreliable internet connectivity, accessing the content and community of school was limited or denied.

This year, COVID continues to impact public schools. At the time of this writing, students under 12 are ineligible for the vaccine, and while districts use multiple layers of safety precautions to limit transmission on our campuses, our students are still contracting COVID 19 in the community. Additionally, COVID protocols and screenings require students to be tested and await results when they have symptoms which often mirror those of allergies or the common cold. That means that many students who might normally appear at school with moderate symptoms are learning remotely for several days at a time, depending on access to testing and/or medical care.

For all of these reasons, we urge the CPUC to work with local agencies within each county to plan middle mile routes that will reach our socio-economically disadvantaged residents, including our students, who are currently unserved or underserved. The LAC supports the Santa Clara County Digital Equity Consortium's comments regarding locating fiber highway segments from San Jose through Gilroy, from Gilroy to Hollister, and from San Jose to Santa Cruz. We also support a high strand count for this network of at least 288 strands of dark fiber across all regions and providing redundancy. Requiring providers who offer affordable existing routes to provide verification of their service claims and holding them accountable for delivering that service is a positive step toward ensuring our low income residents have high quality Internet access. Finally, a county like Santa Clara illustrates the limitations of prioritizing middle mile network investments in areas based on aggregate county level numbers of unserved or underserved households rather than taking into account the high cost of last mile infrastructure in different regions.

III. Conclusion

The LAC appreciates the opportunity to provide input into the State's planning process for the middle mile network. We look forward to the Commission's final decision on the Ruling and hope to see investments in broadband infrastructure statewide that support our low-income residents.

Respectfully submitted September 21, 2021, at San Jose, California.

/s/ Bridget Watson

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Chair

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